ROLLING STONES
UNSEEN 1965-67

STEELY DAN
THEIR 30 GREATEST SONGS

MOJO

The Music Magazine

130 REVIEWS
YARD ACT, SAM LEE JESUS AND MARY CHAIN, CAN & MORE

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THE STONE ROSES =

LIAM GALLAGHER & JOHN SQUIRE
RESURRECTED!

MARVIN GAYE
GETS IT ON

ST. VINCENT
"POST-PLAGUE POP!"

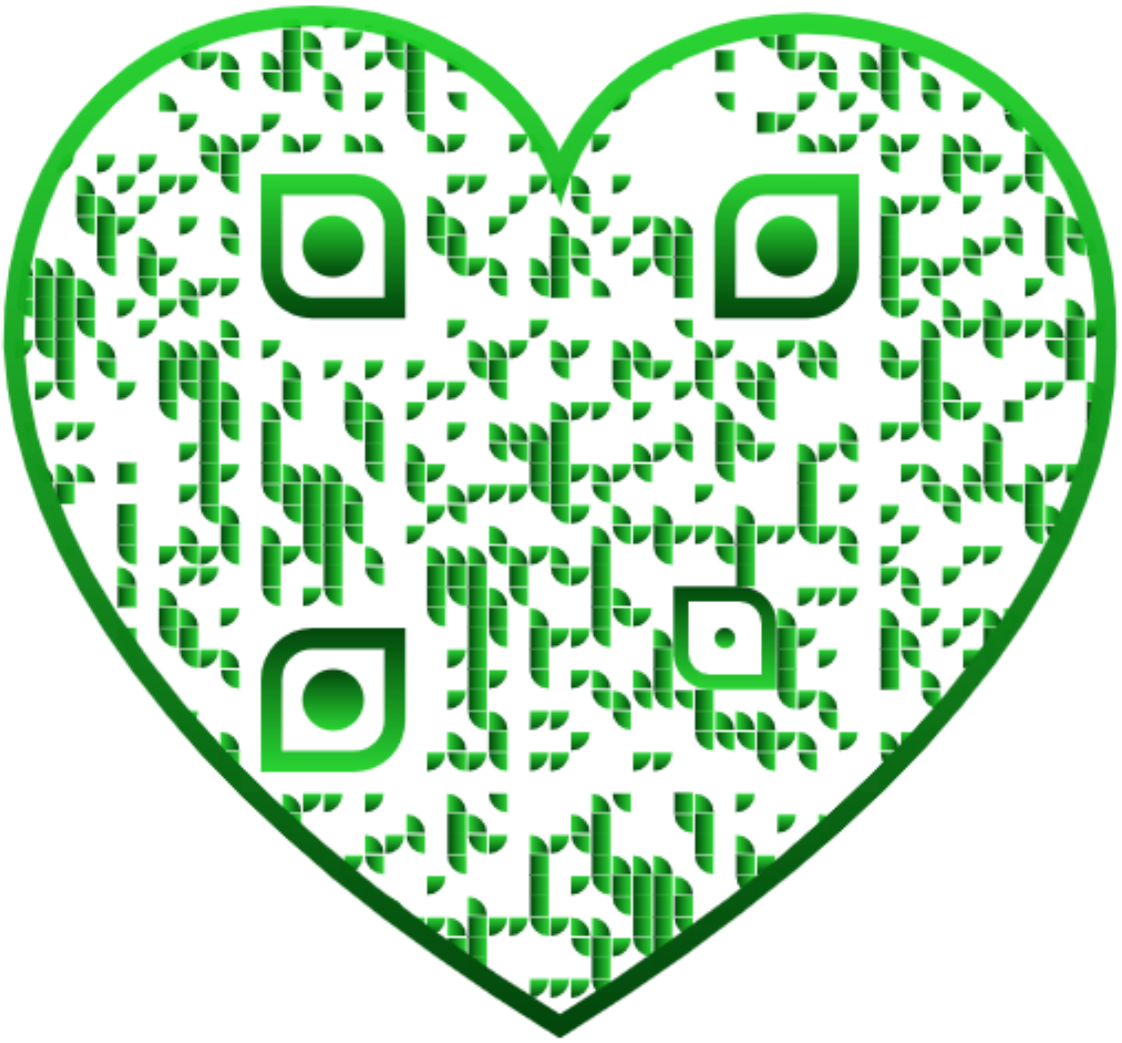
BETH GIBBONS
THE VOICE OF PORTISHEAD RETURNS

RAMONES
HEY HO! LET'S GO!

WAXAHATCHEE
MAPS OUT NEW COUNTRY

MICHAEL HEAD
CULT GENIUS. STAR AT LAST.

MILES DAVIS, DUKE ELLINGTON AND... LENNY KRAVITZ!



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APRIL 2024 ISSUE 365

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38 THE ROLLING STONES Gered Mankowitz captured the Stones for the ages. From his new book, he shares unseen shots and choice stories: "The stewardess asked very sweetly for our guns."

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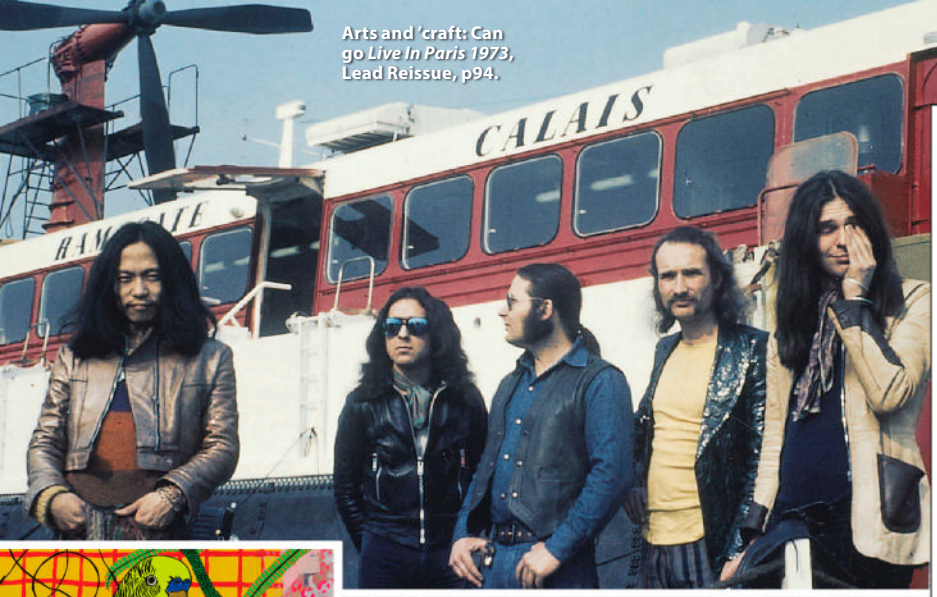
68 LIAM GALLAGHER & JOHN SQUIRE MOJO embeds with the British rock team-up of the decade, as The Stone Roses' guitar great returns from the wilderness and the Oasis singer turns cheerleader: "There should be a lot more music by John Squire out in the world."

Getty



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16 MDOU MOCTAR Niger's Tuareg guitar hero and producer/bassist Mikey Coltun tell us about recording new disc *Funeral For Justice* in an empty house in upstate New York.

18 DION The evergreen titan of doo wop has a new duets LP, *Girl Friends*, to discuss. And what's that about Dylan, gangbusting and talking to dipsos?

19 ST. VINCENT Annie Clark's been shapeshifting again: read on for her spiky new vision, where Dave Grohl and Cate Le Bon fit into it, and a sojourn in hell.

20 THE BEVIS FROND Psychedelic renegade Nick Saloman is 38 years into his singular mission and has no plans to slow down. What's his secret?

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94 REISSUES Can's spectacular *Live In Paris 1973*, plus Neil Young, Emahoy Tsege Mariam Gebru, The Mystic Tide, Linda Smith and more.

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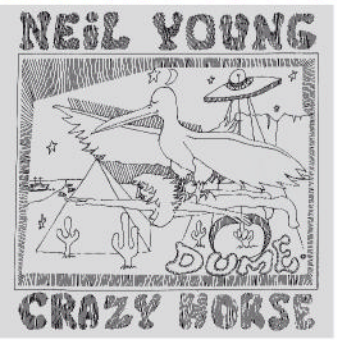


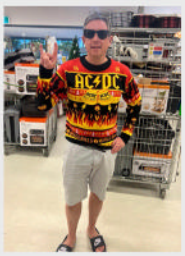
Porch songs: the electric folk sounds of Kayla Cohen, AKA Itasca, Rising, p22.

Green man: Sam Lee goes back to nature, Lead Album, p80.

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE...

Gered Mankowitz

When Gered first shot The Rolling Stones in spring 1965, he had no way of knowing he'd provide umpteen album and single covers, posters, magazine spreads and the band's passport photos. Unpublished and rare shots, including the latter, feature in his new book, extracted from page 38.



Ted Kessler

This month's cover story with Liam Gallagher and John Squire (p68) clashed with a festive trip to Australia for Ted. Ever the professional, he locked himself in a hut down under alongside dog-sized spiders to compose it, pausing only to buy a Christmas day outfit (pictured). His biography of Billy Childish is out in July.

Andrew Perry

Andrew debuted for MOJO with a 1997 oral history of Nirvana, and has since quizzed artists ranging from Jerry Lee Lewis to Los Bitchos. He's ghost-written for John Lydon, Bez and Tricky, none of which prepared him for this month's hair-raising summit with the notorious Butthole Surfers (p32).

Simón Prades, Courtesy of Spoon Records, Logan White

CARGO COLLECTIVE

THE BEVIS FROND
FOCUS ON NATURE
FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

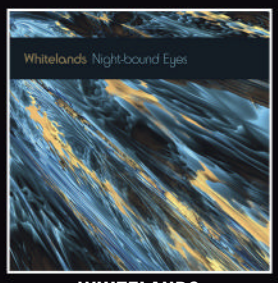
75 minutes of glorious melodies that span 60s psych, English folk, Seattle art-punks The Wipers, the buzzsaw pop of Dinosaur Jr & Hendrix-esque explorations. "Still mixing pop, punk & psych to giddy effect." The Guardian

TELEVISION PERSONALITIES
SOME KIND OF HAPPENING (SINGLES 1978-1989)
FIRE RECORDS 2LP / 2CD BOOKBACK

A comprehensive remastered 2 part collection of all their ground-breaking single releases - includes the Peel-approved '14th Floor', 'Salvador Dali's Garden Party' EP & super rare Creation flexi tracks as The Gifted Children.

SHOOTING DAGGERS
LOVE & RAGE
NEW HEAVY SOUNDS LP / CD

Defiant, feminist hardcore punk. Catchy, kick ass shards of pent up fury and melody, infused with 90's shoegaze and grunge. Meet your new favourite band.



WHITELANDS
NIGHT-BOUND EYES ARE BLIND TO THE DAY
SONIC CATHEDRAL LP / CD

The eagerly awaited debut album from the Black British shoegaze band released in the middle of their UK tour supporting Slowdive. Includes the singles 'Setting Sun' and 'Tell Me About It'.

ASTREL K
THE FOREIGN DEPARTMENT
TOUGH LOVE LP / CD

The Foreign Department is the 2nd album by Astrel K, the solo project helmed by Stockholm-based British ex-pat & Ulrika Spacek frontman, Rhys Edwards, as cathartic, elliptical work that he has unconsciously been working towards his entire creative life.

DEZ DARE
A MILLION GOATS. A MILLION SPARKS. FIN
GOD UNKNOWN RECORDS LP / CD

Fuzz beast Dez Dare is back with his 4th album and most cohesive yet, belting out fuzz riff driven stompers and 8bit nonsense for the aspiring existentialist.

YOVA
DREAMCATCHERS
QUARTERTONE RECORDINGS LP / CD

'Beguiling Sonic Adventurers' (MOJO). YOVA duo Jova Radevska & Mark Vernon's 2nd album features contributions from Terry Edwards (Nick Cave), James Sedwards (Thurston Moore), Rob Ellis (PJ Harvey) & Daniel O'Sullivan (Grumbling Fur).

MIDAS FALL
COLD WAVES DIVIDE US
MONOTREME RECORDS LP / CD

'Cold Waves Divide Us' sees award-winning Midas Fall at their most confidently visceral, each song moving beautifully between quiet & loud, interspersing atmospheric strings & 80s synths with heavier layered elements.

GRACE PETRIE
BUILD SOMETHING BETTER
GRACE PETRIE & ROBOT NEEDS HOME LP / CD

"The musical voice of her generation" - Grace Petrie returns with a new Frank Turner produced record that is full of her powerful socially urgent lyrics and unconstrainable rage.

GARRETT T. CAPPS
Y LOS LONELY HIPSTERS
COWPIE RECORDS LP

With Songs like "Born in San Antone," Capps & The Only Hipsters hope to serve up a solid portion of South Texas timbre, complete with heavy steel guitar, accordion, violin, acoustic & electric guitars, organ, bass & drums in various arrangements.

AMARO FREITAS
Y'Y
PSYCHIC HOTLINE LP / CD

Amaro Freitas intwines ancestral knowledge into his "decolonized" interpretation of jazz that shatters preconceived notions of the genre. Ft. Hamid Drake, Shabaka Hutchings, Jeff Parker, Aniel Someillan, and Brandee Younger.

GHOST FUNK ORCHESTRA
A TRIP TO THE MOON
KARMA CHIEF RECORDS LP / CD

'A Trip To The Moon' sees Ghost Funk Orchestra diving deeper in the worlds of film music, exotica, and psychedelic surf rock, all tied together by real recorded transmissions from the Apollo moon missions.

BACAO RHYTHM & STEEL BAND
BRSB
BIG CROWN LP / CD

The mysterious steel pan outfit from Hamburg, Germany are back with their 4th full length "BRSB". A rock solid offering of covers from the likes of Snoop Dogg & Dr Dre, Claudja Barry, Drake, & the Stranger Things theme song mixed with killer original compositions.

CREDIT ELECTRIC
SIX
ROYAL OAKIE CD

"weaves a tapestry of lush sounds and melancholic moods, all processed through a cosmic desert country style." Various Small Flames // "…mulls loss & loneliness, rolling them around in the brain…" Raven Sings the Blues.

PREGOBLIN
PREGOBLIN II
STRAP ORIGINALS LP

"PREGOBLIN II's genre-straddling dexterity and melodic riches mark it out as a loser classic fit to rank alongside Beck and Daniel Johnston… forward-facing and inspired" ★★★★ MOJO

TOM MCRAE
ÉTRANGE HIVER
BUZZARD TREE LP / CD

Étrange Hiver (Strange Winter) is UK songwriter, Tom McRae's 9th studio album. An exquisite collection of original duets with renowned French artists, such as Keren Ann, Chien Noir, Alex Beaupain, Clou and more.

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THE NORTH WILL RISE AGAIN

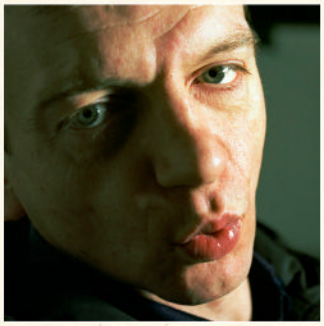
MOJO 15 MANCHESTER ANTHEMS

THE FALL • MAGAZINE • BLACK GRAPE • JAMES • PETER HOOK • THE DURUTTI COLUMN AND MORE

1 A CERTAIN RATIO & ELLEN BETH ABDI
AFRO DIZZY

One of the first bands to sign to Factory, ACR's seriousness was so pronounced a Manchester fanzine noted they "make Joy Division look like Monty Python". Paradoxically, though, their embracing of dance music has made them one of the city's most enduring musical institutions – as this 2023 Afrobeat-infused workout illustrates.

Written by Johnson, Kerr, Moscrop, Abdi. Published by Mute Song. ℗&©2022 A Certain Ratio under exclusive licence to Mute Artists Ltd. From *1982* (Mute); mute.com



2 THE FALL
MASQUERADE

Hard to imagine a Manchester comp without a dose of Mark E Smith's genius, hence this selection from 1997's underrated *Levitate*. Made at a time when The Fall were in even greater turmoil than usual, Masquerade fuses Smith's fervid glossolalia to a pumping, steam-powered vision of techno: an indie-dance hybrid different from the usual moves of the era.

Written by Smith, Nagle. Publisher – BMG Rights Management (UK) Ltd, Invisible Girl Music. ISRC CODE – GBBLY1604083. ℗1998 Cherry Red Records Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Cherry Red Records Ltd

3 BLACK GRAPE
PIMP WARS

"I'm an artist, baby," insists Shaun Ryder, not unreasonably, another maverick frontman with a taste for reinventing the language. Ryder currently operates in two other bands – Happy Mondays and Mantra Of The Cosmos – but his artistic energies seem most focused on the funky surrealism of Black Grape, alongside mid-'90s rapping foil, Kermit. Pimp Wars is plucked from the duo's new album, *Orange Head*.

Written by Shaun Ryder and Kermit. ℗2023 Dgaff Recordings. ©2023 Dgaff Recordings. ISRC UK9AV2301746

4 PETER HOOK AND THE LIGHT FEATURING ROWETTA
NEW DAWN FADES

Another Happy Mondays alum, Rowetta hooks up with Peter Hook and his post-New Order group, lending her formidable voice to the Joy Division classic. Part of Hook's ongoing negotiations with his past and that imposing musical legacy.

Written by Hook, Sumner, Curtis, Morris. Universal Publishing. Performed by Peter Hook And The Light Feat. Rowetta. From *Unknown Pleasures* Factory Records M/CR

9 THE HIGH
BOX SET GO (MARTIN HANNETT VERSION)

If the chiming guitars here are reminiscent of early Stone Roses, there's a good reason: guitarist Andy Couzens was actually in The Stone Roses (he appeared on debut single So Young before leaving in 1986). The psychedelic lope of Box Set Go was the band's debut single from 1990, produced by the legendary Martin Hannett. The band split after two albums in 1993, re-forming in 2015.

Written by Couzens, Matthews, Goodwin, Davies. Copyright Thin Line Productions. From *Martin Hannett Sessions* released on Vinyl Revival 2020

10 MAGAZINE
DO THE MEANING

Manchester *éminences grises* Magazine reunited after 27 years in 2009, their belated fifth LP following in 2011. Opener Do The Meaning showed how their taste for art-rock drama had not diminished over time – and also featured a co-songwriting credit for Howard Devoto's old Buzzcocks foil, Pete Shelley.

Lyrics by Howard Devoto/Pete Shelley. Music by Howard Devoto/John Doyle/Dave Formula/Noko. Published by Mute Song/Domino Music Publishing/Reverb Music/Complete-Universal. The copyright in this sound recording is owned by Devoto/Doyle/Formula/Noko. From *No Thyself*. First released 2011. Wire-Sound. www.wire-sound.com

11 VOICE OF THE SEVEN THUNDERS
THE BURNING MOUNTAIN

The Manchester area's musical history is full of indie rock guitar heroes – Johnny Marr, John Squire, Noel Gallagher – but here's one from under the radar. Rick Tomlinson's taste for arcane folk picking and ferocious electric jams emerged in the early 2000s as a UK answer to the US underground psych uprising, thanks to Anatolian-tinged freakouts like this one from Voice Of The Seven Thunders' self-titled 2010 cult classic.

Written by Tomlinson. ℗&©Rick Tomlinson 2010. From *Voice Of The Seven Thunders* (Tchantinler Recordings); voiceofthesevenwoods.com

12 THE DURUTTI COLUMN
CHANT

Talking of cult guitarists, few come more venerated than Vini Reilly, pivot of The Durutti Column, whose punk apprenticeship in Ed Banger & The Nosebleeds was scant indication of the spectral, filigree music that would become his trademark. Chant is from 2010's *A Paean To Wilson*, a tribute to Reilly's friend and mentor Tony Wilson who died in 2007; that's Wilson sampled at the track's start.

Written by Reilly, Stewart, Mitchell. Published by Concord Copyrights London Ltd. ℗&©2009 Bruce Mitchell, The Durutti Column. From *A Paean To Wilson* (Kookydisc); Kookydisc.co.uk

Paul Husband (2), David Tonge/Getty, Cavendish Press, Dave Overton, Brian Rasic/Getty, Graeme Oxby, Alex Jako, Mute, Mick Hutson/Getty

"I OFTEN THINK IT MUST BE AWFUL TO BE INVOLVED IN THE record business and live in Tokyo or Philadelphia," Factory Records boss Tony Wilson told Sounds magazine in 1987. "You could go out every night of the year in New York and not find anyone with talent, whereas in Manchester, once a fortnight you see a good group."

The bullish exaggeration, the provocateur's contempt for any city other than Manchester, was all very much on brand. And yet at the heart of Wilson's hyperbole was a large kernel of truth: from the late 1970s, through the next couple of decades, Manchester really did seem to be producing great bands at an astonishing rate. This month, as two of the city's most prominent ambassadors in Liam Gallagher and John Squire unite for a new album, MOJO revisits the critical sounds of Manchester. It's a place where rock and dance intersect on the Haçienda dancefloor; where outsider visionaries remake music in their own idiosyncratic images; where guitar heroes – and bass heroes – proliferate, while disdaining most of the baggage that normally comes with the job. Trust us: *The North Will Rise Again*!

5 JAMES
HYMN FROM A VILLAGE

When Tim Booth exhorted his listeners to "Go and read a book/It's so much more worthwhile" in 1985 on their second single, James instantly became most Smiths fans' favourite new band. Nearly 40 years on, it still resonates – and few Manchester bands of that era are as big in 2024. For a new version of Hymn…, check James's radical recastings of their old songs on 2023's *Be Opened By The Wonderful*.

Written by Booth, Gott, Glennie and Whelan. Label: Nothing But Love. Publishing: Nothing But Love. ℗&©1985

6 BLUE ORCHIDS
BAD EDUCATION

Dozens of musicians passed through the ranks of The Fall in their 44-year history, but few had as satisfactory a post-Fall career as Martin Bramah, joined on the earliest Blue Orchids records by fellow survivor Una Baines. Bramah rejoined The Fall in the late '80s before reviving the Blue Orchids; tenth album *Magpie Heights* was released in 2023.

Written by Bramah, Baines. Published by Four Curries Music ℗&©2024 Tiny Global Productions. From *The Greatest Hit* (Money Mountain): tinyglobalproductions.bandcamp.com

7 MIAOW
SPORT MOST ROYAL

In that 1987 Sounds piece, Tony Wilson predicted Miaow would become the next Smiths, and the band fronted by music journalist Cath Carroll certainly deserved to be better known. The jangling indie skiffle of Sport Most Royal was their most famous three minutes, thanks to its inclusion on NME's *C86* tape. By the end of the 1980s, the band had split and Carroll went solo.

Written by Carroll, Caine, Fenner, Winters. Published by LTM Songs. ℗&©1986 Miaow. Originally released on the NME compilation *C86*. www.ltmrecordings.com/cath_carroll.html

8 NEW FAST AUTOMATIC DAFFODILS
BIG

Funky outliers on the baggy scene, the New FADs were a cut above most of ACR's frequently austere descendants. The mantric groove of 1990 breakthrough single Big encapsulates their powers.

Written by Crawford, Hewison, Saunders, Spearpoint. (Bucks Music Limited) ℗1990 The copyright in this sound recording is owned by Sense of Fun Limited t/a Playtime Records ISRC: GBCDM9010003. newfastautomaticdaffodils.bandcamp.com/ www.facebook.com/playtimerecordco

13 QUANDO QUANGO
TRIANGLE

Another notable figure in the Factory Records story alongside Wilson, Mike Pickering was the label's A&R man as well as Haçienda DJ and Quando Quango lynchpin, before founding M People. A 1984 single with blood ties to New Order's Confusion, Triangle also had a striking supporting cast: guitars from Johnny Marr and Vini Reilly; production from Bernard Sumner.

Written by Pickering/Rietveld. Published by LTM Songs. ℗&©1984 Quando Quango. Produced by Bernard Sumner and Donald Johnson. Originally released as a 12-inch single on Factory Records (Fac 102) in June 1984. www.factorybenelux.com

14 INSPIRAL CARPETS
THEME FROM COW

Alongside The Charlatans, Inspiral Carpets brought a garage-rock punch to the Madchester scene, thanks to ? & The Mysterians-inspired tunes like this early EP track (Cow being the band's own record label) with Clint Boon's Farfisa typically to the fore. The band's story was enriched by the subsequent success of their sometime roadie and guitar tech, Noel Gallagher.

Written by Martyn Walsh, Clint Boon, Craig Gill, Tom Hingley, Graham Lambert. Mute Song Ltd. ℗1988 Mute Records Ltd., a BMG company. Licensed courtesy of BMG Rights Management (UK) Ltd ISRC: GBAJH0300260

15 A GUY CALLED GERALD
KONCRETE JUNGLE

As the Manchester music scene flourished, the city was beset with warring drug gangs and gun crime, tragedies memorialised on this 1993 track by beats pioneer Gerald Simpson, AKA A Guy Called Gerald. Simpson made his name with 1988 rave anthem Voodoo Ray, but in the '90s focused on a hyper-detailed, kinetic brand of drum'n'bass of which Koncrete Jungle is a superb – and previously unreleased – example.

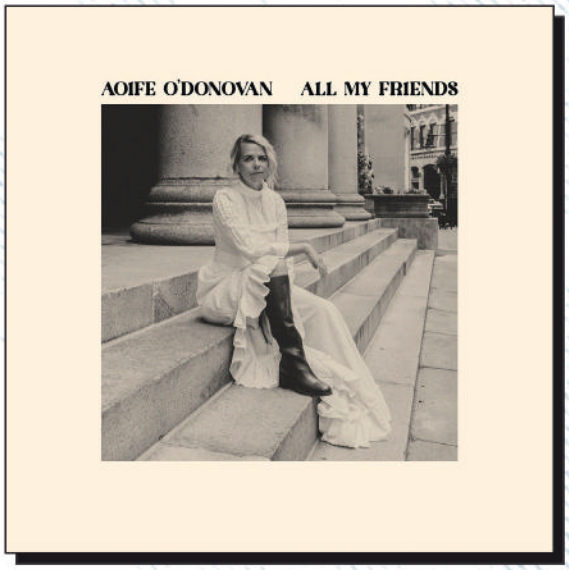
Written by Gerald Simpson. Published by Gerald Rydel Simpson. ℗&©1993 (Previously unreleased) www.guycalledgerald.com

"I NEEDED GUITARS BACK IN MY LIFE..."

LIAM GALLAGHER AND JOHN SQUIRE COME TOGETHER

INTERVIEW STARTS PAGE 68

Coming This Spring From Yep Roc Records



AOIFE O'DONOVAN
ALL MY FRIENDS

The follow-up to Aoife O'Donovan's 3x GRAMMY® nominated album *Age of Apathy.*

OUT 22 MARCH

ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO
ECHO DANCING

Alejandro Escovedo reimagines songs from his vast catalog

OUT 29 MARCH

Blitzen Trapper
100's Of 1000's, Millions Of Billions

"The Oregon band is shaping a new Pacific Northwest rock scene with hippie anthems for troubled times"
—Rolling Stone

OUT 17 MAY

Yep Roc Records

ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING...

The Bacon Brothers

KEVIN BACON WITH BRO' MICHAEL

What music are you currently grooving to?

Kevin Bacon: I can't stop listening to [**Bruno Mars** and **Anderson .Paak** supergroup] **Silk Sonic**. I'm getting ready to do a series that has some vintage country roots so I have a playlist, people like **Eddy Arnold**, **Ralph Stanley**, **Townes Van Zandt**, **Lucinda Williams** and **Johnny Cash**.
Michael Bacon: I love **Lawrence**. They're a brother/sister group from Brooklyn and unabashedly soulful.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

MB: *Music From Big Pink*, **The Band**.
KB: Maybe **Earth, Wind & Fire**'s *That's The Way Of The World* or *Revolver* by **The Beatles**. Or **Stevie Wonder**'s *Songs In The Key Of Life*.

What was the first record you ever bought and where did you buy it?

MB: *Jerry Blavat Presents For Dancers Only*. Purchased at Sam Goody.
KB: *Sgt. Pepper's*. My friend Harry and I put our loose change together to buy it. We were in Philadelphia.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

MB: Pete Seeger, he wrote so many unforgettable songs.
KB: I guess **Springsteen**? Just an all-around great singer, player, writer, and have you ever seen a show?

What do you sing in the shower?

MB: I'm more of a bath guy. I do my vocal exercises.
KB: Don't Let The Sun Go Down On Me by **Elton John**.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

MB: Jacqueline du Pré's *Elgar's Cello Concerto*.
KB: Al Green's *Greatest Hits*.

And your Sunday morning record?

MB: *Road* by **The Winter Consort**.
KB: The *Jesus Christ Superstar* original cast album.

The Bacon Brothers' Put Your Hand Up is out on April 19 via Forosoco Music/40 Below Records.

Florence Shaw

DRY CLEANING'S EAGLE EYE

What music are you currently grooving to?

I listen to certain songs on repeat: at the moment it's Follower by **Canty**, Fentanyl Freddy by **A. A. Bondy**, and Bridgestone 4 by **Yasuaki Shimizu**, a short piece of ambient music written for a tyre commercial. To fight January blues I listened to *The Dolby Decades* by **John Shuttleworth**.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

For sentimental reasons I'm going to say *The Velvet Underground* by **The Velvet Underground**, but can I add *Without You I'm Nothing* by **Placebo**, *Aura Type Orange* by **Brother May**, *Non-Stop Erotic Cabaret* by **Soft Cell**, **Yuzo Koshiro**'s Streets Of Rage soundtrack and *The Red Shoes: Music From The Films Of Powell & Pressburger*?

Jacob Blinkenstaff, Max Miechowski

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

Two that I know were early – **A+**, Enjoy Yourself on cassette, and the CD single of Re-Rewind by **The Artful Dodger** and **Craig David**, from the Crystal Palace branch of Woolworths.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Cher seems like an awesome person. She's lived a life on her own terms, has dictated her own beauty standard and married a baker and worked with Bob Mackie, and her mum lived to be 96, and she has a serene, awe-inspiring look.

What do you sing in the shower?

Thinking Of You by **Sister Sledge**.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Horizon Unlimited by the **Lijadu Sisters**. For optimistic motivation I like *Orbital* by **Orbital** and *GAK* by **GAK**. **Joe Tossini and Friends**' *Lady Of Mine* is my late, late night record, maybe to put on when you get in.

And your Sunday morning record?

On Your Own Love Again by **Jessica Pratt**, followed by *A Tàbua De Esmeralda* by **Jorge Ben**.

Dry Cleaning's EPs collection Boundary Road Snacks And Drinks/Sweet Princess is released on March 8 on 4AD.

Judie Tzuke

SHE IS THE PHOENIX

What music are you currently grooving to?

Scott Matthews and **Hozier**. They've got a hint of folk but they can get quite noisy too. And **T.I.G.Y**, which is my daughter. She does kind of poetry to music. It's all a bit sad, but this runs in our family, we tend to write our feelings down.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Solid Air by **John Martyn**. It was such a massive influence, when he went from acoustic folk into sort of stoned electric – it was the perfect point where it had both.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

Hey Joe by **The Jimi Hendrix Experience**. I lived just off Piccadilly in London with my dad, and got it from a little cubicle that sold records on Shepherd Market, on my walk to school.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Sarah McLachlan, because of all the other things she did around her music, and the Lilith Fair. I tried to get on it but I wasn't famous enough! Also **Joni Mitchell** and **Kate Bush**. But you know, I've been me for a long time.

> "I've been me for a long time."
> **JUDIE TZUKE**

What do you sing in the shower?

The last thing I heard, probably. Maybe the **Steve Miller Band**'s You Send Me. I sing more in the car, actually. I love driving to France, listening to **Gérald de Palmas** and singing along in pretend French.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

I love very loud music but I live in a semi-detached house… I'll put **Jamie Woon** on, and **Jackson Browne** sometimes, and I'm a big fan of **Fink**. I stay in a lot, but I also go to gigs.

And your Sunday morning record?

I'll dip in and out of something by **James Blake**, or **James Vincent McMorrow**. Music is my life, really.

Judie's Jude The Unsinkable is out now via Big Moon Records.

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THERE IS, AS EVER, AN ADMIRABLE candour to Liam Gallagher when you get past the provocations. This month, he tells MOJO of his new partnership with John Squire, talking about the Stone Roses guitarist with touchingly fannish ardour. The *Liam Gallagher John Squire* album might well be the finest record either of them has made for nearly 30 years, but Gallagher is also pragmatic enough to address the question of an Oasis reunion, and the summer solo shows where he'll perform *Definitely Maybe* in its entirety. "People say it's the comfort zone," he notes, "I want to be in the comfort zone! Life's stressful enough."

The comfort zone isn't traditionally a place where we hardcore music fans see ourselves spending much time: the radical, the obscure, the neglected and unknown are what give us our bona fides as serious heads. Nevertheless, the familiar can provide great solace, and our favourite music can reveal infinite hidden nuance to us over the years and decades. It's why we all keep coming back and taking fresh pleasure from a record we've heard thousands of times, and why MOJO – as well as locating dozens of valuable new records each month – keeps digging away to find the new angles on songs and stories you thought you knew by heart. "Me, I love nostalgia," says Liam. And while our relationship with history is hopefully a bit more complicated than that – well, maybe he has a point?

JOHN MULVEY, EDITOR

That is what true disruption is

Your piece on Shane MacGowan in MOJO 364 quotes Shane as saying, "the original punk scene… was extremely elitist." But isn't every original scene by nature elitist, as all original scenesters believe they're participating in something unheralded and as yet untouched by the powers that be? Shane was indeed an original punk, yet he was original in so many other ways, and Ann Scanlon covered them a lot better than I could ever hope to. Shane was also quoted in her piece saying, "Basically [punk] was created by the beginning of 1977. If anybody got into it after that they were just a pile of shite." But when I saw Penelope Spheeris's 1981 movie, The Decline Of Western Civilization, filmed through 1979 and 1980, I was astounded by those LA punks who were pogoing atop the San Andreas faultline. So, sorry Shane my brother, but these dudes must be considered the best punks ever. R.I.P. Shane. You were and always will be a wonder.

Tom Kinsella, Dublin

It was supposed to be a tribute to Beyoncé, but people did not take it that way

As a reader of many years, I have to say MOJO 364's CD, *Jet Powered Pop!*, is the best one you've ever done – by a distance. Simply 15 brilliant songs. All killer no filler, I believe is the term. I mean, The dB's, XTC and Nada Surf would have been enough, but to then throw in Teenage Fanclub, Gaz Coombes and The Lemon Twigs… WOW! What a way to start the year.

Dave Bailey, via e-mail

I know you guys think I'm a hippy

Great to see Fraternity featured on your *Boogie Children* CD [MOJO 363], but you then refer to them as a "Sydney band". No sir, not even close. Fraternity were very much an Adelaide band, who formed in and resided in the Adelaide Hills, *Big Pink* style. Livestock may suggest "an Antipodean CSNY" but these guys definitely wanted to be The Band. Fraternity were the

first band I ever saw play live, and I distinctly remember Bon Scott in full hippy mode playing recorder on the band's only hit, Seasons Of Change. I also recall a pretty decent version of The Band's The Shape I'm In. Bon was from Perth but lived in Adelaide for some time. Fortunately, Sylvie Simmons gets it right in her excellent piece on AC/DC's formative years.

Jeff Crawford, Adelaide (where else?)

It's like putting a loaded gun on the table and turning off the lights

Thank you for an excellent feature on The Black Crowes [MOJO 364] – I await their new recordings with great anticipation. Even at their most fractious, the Crowes have always been an outstanding live rock'n'roll act, comparable to the Stones in their '70s heyday. *The Southern Harmony And Musical Companion*, like all great albums, stands up to constant relistening. And while on the subject of the run of best albums [MOJO 363], surely *Rubber Soul* to *Abbey Road*?

Humphrey Keenlyside, London

We will do what we always do – deny, half apologise, and then go silent a while

The review of Conchúr White's album *Swirling Violets* [MOJO 363], has as part of the review "pronounced 'Conor'". As an Irishman and a father of a Conor, can I correct, respectfully: Conchúr is pronounced in our language (Irish) as "Kroch-úr", or "Con-Ku-Bar". As a native speaker of one of the world's oldest languages, we already have our beautiful tongue butchered by poor Anglicisation.

John Cuffe, Meath, Ireland

You're thrown out of the airlock. It's a no-brainer.

I'd like to suggest a couple of possible new Beatles projects that may never have occurred to whoever runs Apple these days. First of all, re-release A Hard Day's Night and Help! to theatres, in subtitled editions, enabling moviegoers to sing along. Other film musicals such as The Sound Of Music and Mary Poppins have enjoyed profitable second lives in singalong versions. Watching Beatle films at home is fun, but there is no substitute for sharing the films with a cinema audience, on a big screen, with state-of-the-art sound, armed with a bag of popcorn.

Second idea: make a second animated Fabs film. There's a lot of Beatles songs which might be entertainingly animated: Mean Mr Mustard, Dear Prudence, Penny Lane, Back In The USSR, Come Together, Drive My Car, Lady Madonna, Rocky Raccoon and Birthday are just a few that come to mind. Yellow Submarine did not use actual Beatle voices for the spoken dialogue – they hired impersonators – and they could do that again. OK, Apple! The ball's in your court.

David English, Acton, MA

I'm a truth teller. Some people can't handle it.

I've been a subscriber for a number of years and I always appreciate the fine writing, the amazing photos and the free CDs. But upon receiving your *Best Of 2023* CD [MOJO 362] and trying to listen to it, I realised that all the jokes about the best music being from the '60s and '70s and even '80s are true. If this is the best that we can do for 2023 I am severely disappointed. I tried to get into every song and they were all terrible: no melody, no rhythm, no beat, no heart, no soul, nothing – it was complete garbage and also boring. I'm sorry but if that's what people are listening to these days and think is good music, I'm shocked.

James Mccurrach, Campbell, California

It's all just fake smiles and agendas and people wanting what they think they're owed

364 issues so far and I have purchased every one! And yet, despite the repeated articles on certain major names, there's not been one feature on Bob Seger in all that time, which seems a puzzling omission for such a major figure in US rock history. As this year marks the 50th anniversary of the release of his pivotal LP *Beautiful Loser* (whose songs provided the bedrock of his breakthrough *Live Bullet*), might it be a good time to revisit the Detroit rocker's career? After all, this is the man who gave us the greatest on-the-road song ever in Turn The Page, not to mention Night Moves.

Simon Ireland, Eastbourne

I'm trying real hard to buttress, but this sounds nuts

I recently read a communication from Marillion, advising their fan base of the varying mark-ups that would be applied to their merch during their recent tour. They even advised fans NOT to buy from certain venues and that even if postage and packing were added, it would be a better price to order direct from Marillion.com. I appreciate there are two sides to the problem, with venues under huge pressures all round, but fans are being ripped off. Has MOJO ever had a look at this? I think you could do a fair job of shining a light on the issues – you never know, a bit of reason might follow.

John Cripps, via e-mail

I've got to say, the world's greatest detective, I thought you'd be better at this

Too easy! The quotes on MOJO 364's letters page come from the James Bond film Live And Let Die, with the title song written and performed, of course, by Paul McCartney And Wings. On hearing the single release of the track, according to Paul himself, director Guy Hamilton said, "Yeah, that's good for a demo, but when are you going to do the real record?"

Kevin Rawlings, via e-mail

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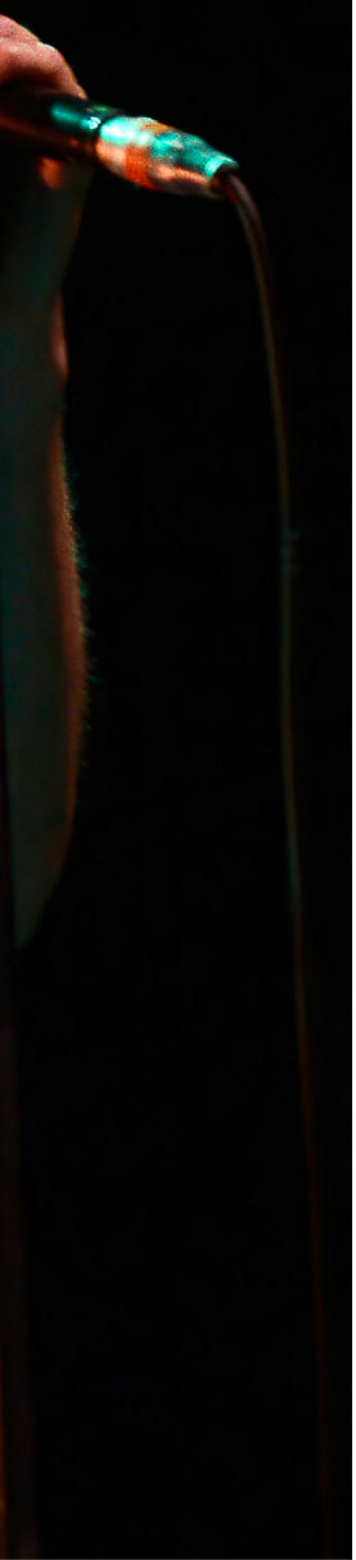
WHAT GOES ON!

THE HOT NEWS AND BIZARRE STORIES FROM PLANET MOJO

In the moment: (left) Beth Gibbons on-stage in 2015; (above from left) Gibbons, Lee Harris and James Ford recording *Lives Outgrown*.



Avon Flow

Portishead's **Beth Gibbons** prepares her first album of new material for 22 years? Collaborators Lee Harris and James Ford explain all.

THE LAST RECORD Portishead singer Beth Gibbons released was 2019's *Henryk Górecki: Symphony No. 3 (Symphony Of Sorrowful Songs)*, which she sang with The Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Warsaw in 2014. Unknown to all, that year she'd also begun work on a new solo record. That LP, titled *Lives Outgrown*, is released in May.

Her creative foil this time is ex-Talk Talk drummer Lee Harris. She first worked with him in 1994 with .O.Rang, the group he formed with fellow ex-Talk Talk man Paul Webb. It was Webb who produced 2002's much-admired Beth Gibbons & Rustin Man album *Out Of Season*.

"First, we just got together to start looking for sounds," Harris tells MOJO. "Beth had a few things, but it was all too normal. We had to look for a way that she could feel natural and comfortable. We went through loads of stages, gradually building up our palette. When we found that, that's when we actually started writing tracks."

Anything familiar was out, he says, with an ineffable organic beyondness of sound the objective. Consequently, they used a cardboard box full of curtains as a bass drum, sought out the most ancient, dullest guitar strings, and played piano strings with spoons. This exploratory approach complemented a sporadic working pattern where Harris went down to Gibbons' barn set-up in Devon, and later State Of Art studios in Bristol. After four "bitty" years, says Harris, they had 10 stylistically varied tracks with what he calls, "a similar vibe, like a psychedelic, pastoral, soft explosion."

Pre-lockdown, Gibbons' label Domino contacted James Ford, producer of Blur, Depeche Mode and more.

"They said, 'They need some help to get over the line,'" says Ford. "It was all pretty kind of deep and dark and pagan – mainly acoustic guitar and her voice, and these sort of quiet, polyrhythmic drums. Some of it was quite well formed, and some of it was pretty loose."

Completed in Bristol and London over the next two years, and with Ford contributing musically, the finished, synth-free album includes contemporary classical string arrangements, violin by Kate Bush's nephew Raven and myriad acoustic textures, including a Chinese bass ruan, hammered dulcimer and layered woodwind. Vaporous lead track Floating On A Moment features Gibbons' kids on backing vocals.

"Floating On A Moment is probably one of the cheerier ones," says Ford, who says they didn't talk about Portishead except in passing. "It kind of goes bleaker from there. It's related to real stuff and it's from a real place, to the point where it's almost painful to listen to sometimes. But there's a beauty in the sadness."

"My fifties have brought forward a new, yet older, horizon," said Gibbons in a statement. "It has been a time of farewells to family, friends and even to who I was before, the lyrics mirroring my anxieties and sleepless nighttime ruminations… I wanted to draw away from breakbeats and snares, focusing on the woody fabric of timbres, away from the sugary addiction of high frequencies."

Other songs may be called Blue, Reach and Burden Of Life. At press time Gibbons was rehearsing to play them live. Due to Harris's back problem, Ford is on drums. "I went down for a few rehearsals just before Christmas," says Harris. "It's sounding good!" He's also looking forward to more music, with three tracks awaiting completion. "Beth was quite keen to book a studio a few months ago," he says. "So there is a possibility of another album."

Harris adds that her voice is a different instrument these days. "On this album she's really explored more of her lower tones," he says. "She hasn't really used all her range before, and there are no 'character' voices. It's definitely richer and more stripped down to just her, you know? She was afraid of going there before… now, it feels like she's landed."

Ian Harrison

"It's a psychedelic, pastoral, soft explosion."
LEE HARRIS

Jose Jordan/AFP via Getty Images

In pod we trust: (from left) recent MOJO podcast guests Idles' Joe Talbot and Shaggs-loving Robert Fripp, plus host MOJO's Andrew Male.

THE MOJO RECORD CLUB PODCAST RETURNS FOR SEASON TWO!

"THE CONCEPT of this podcast is hidden gems," Idles' Joe Talbot tells Andrew Male in the latest instalment of The MOJO Record Club podcast. "But for me, these albums are like lifelines… Since I was a very young boy, since I was given headphones by my dad, music's been my safe place… There are certain albums that reinvigorate my imagination, my lust for everything."

For the past year and a half, we've been inviting some of our favourite musicians to join us on The MOJO Record Club podcast. In the company of our host, MOJO's Senior Associate Editor Andrew Male, they've been encouraged to tell us about a record they love – a "lifeline", as Joe Talbot would have it. The resulting interviews have been wide-ranging, thought-provoking and often revelatory – who knew, for instance, that guitar virtuoso Robert Fripp would turn out to be a passionate fan of the ultra-primitive outsider jams of The Shaggs?

> "The concept of this podcast is hidden gems."
> IDLES' JOE TALBOT

The new episode with Joe Talbot kicks off Season Two of the podcast, and his chosen record is the "doom-like bluesy pitter-patter music" of Timber Timbre's self-titled album from 2009, featuring what Talbot refers to tantalisingly as "a sinister raconteur with a dagger". But there's also plenty of time for him to discuss the new Idles album, *Tangk*, and touch on Lee Moses, Bill Callahan, The Pharcyde, Van Morrison, Traams, The Smiths and much more. Then, as usual, Andrew is joined by other members of the MOJO team to review a couple of significant new albums.

There'll be new episodes of The MOJO Record Club dropping regularly through 2024, but in the meantime all 30-plus episodes of Season One are now available to hear for free at your usual podcast places. As you can see (right), it's an impressive and eclectic list of guests and musical selections.

"You cannot grow bored as an artist," Joe Talbot says in that new episode. "If you grow bored, you are boring. If you're interested, you're interesting… And what comes with that is progress and conversation."

Progress. Conversation. That's The MOJO Record Club – and, as Andrew always says, you can all join in.

The MOJO Record Club is available to hear on Apple, Spotify and all your usual podcast places.

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- **ROBERT FORSTER** on *First Take* by Roberta Flack
- Big Star's **JODY STEPHENS** on *Willis Alan Ramsey* by Willis Alan Ramsey
- **NATALIE MERCHANT** on *Chelsea Girl* by Nico
- The Selecter's **PAULINE BLACK** on *Basket Of Light* by Pentangle
- **LLOYD COLE** on *Real Life* by Joan As Police Woman
- **RICKIE LEE JONES** on *Veedon Fleece* by Van Morrison
- Dexys' **KEVIN ROWLAND** on *It's Too Late To Stop Now* by Van Morrison
- **TOYAH WILLCOX** and **ROBERT FRIPP** on *The Man Who Sold The World* by David Bowie and *Philosophy Of The World* by The Shaggs
- Drive-By Truckers' **MIKE COOLEY** and **PATTERSON HOOD** on *War Babies* by Hall & Oates and *The Glands* by The Glands
- Jethro Tull's **IAN ANDERSON** on *Come Out Fighting Genghis Smith* by Roy Harper
- **JIM O'ROURKE** on *Word Of Mouth* by Jaco Pastorius
- Throwing Muses' **KRISTIN HERSH** on *Experimental Jelly* by Tomorrow's Tulips
- Pulp's **NICK BANKS** on *Cut* by The Slits
- Teenage Fanclub's **NORMAN BLAKE** on *Quebec* by Ween
- The Coral's **JAMES SKELLY** on *Elusive Butterfly* by Bob Lind

GIMME FIVE... INSPIRED GIBBERISH TITLES

Adriano Celentano
Prisencólinensináinciúsol
(CLAN CELENTANO, 1972)

Grooving on one chord with nonsense words phonetically contrived to sound like US-accented English to Italian audiences. Unquestioning Americanophilia gloriously skewered. Dead catchy.

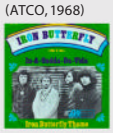
Talking Heads
I Zimbra
(SIRE, 1979)

Over hi-tensile Afro-funk, Dada artist Hugo Ball's 1916 poem Gadji Beri Bimba – where invented words attempt to wrestle with the horrors of the First World War – is repurposed. Features bv's by Brian Eno and congas by The Slits' Ari Up.

Little Richard
Bama Lama Bama Loo
(SPECIALTY, 1964)

A sequel of sorts to Tutti Frutti's "A-Wop-Bop-A-Loo-Bop-A-Lop-Bom-Bom", here's more foot-down Richard wildness that could mean anything. File next to The Edsels' Rama Lama Ding Dong and Dicky Doo & The Don'ts Nee Nee Na Na Na Na Nu Nu.

Iron Butterfly
In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida
(ATCO, 1968)



Best heard in its original 17-minute majesty, this prowling psych creation myth was entitled In The Garden Of Eden, but got retitled when writer Doug Ingle drank a gallon of wine and drunkenly slurred the words to drummer Ron Bushy.

Yellowman
Zungguzungguguzung-guzeng
(GREENSLEEVES, 1983)

The dancehall deejay devised the title for this popular 'I'm so great' tune, possibly to put the whammy on his opponents. See also Eek-A-Mouse's bing-bing-binging Anarexol for another wild reggae flight of lexical fancy.

Jeff Spicer/Getty, Biff Blumfumgagne

If you're into it

it's in the V&A

David Bowie poster
1974

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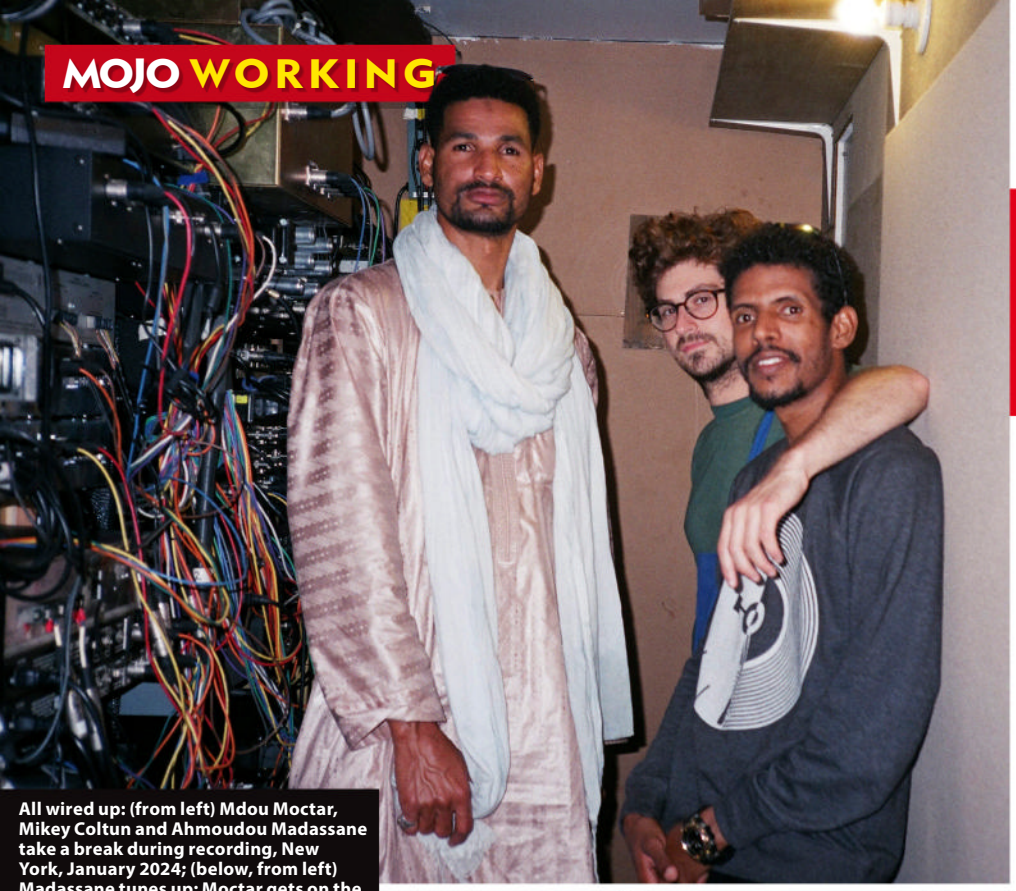

All wired up: (from left) Mdou Moctar, Mikey Coltun and Ahmoudou Madassane take a break during recording, New York, January 2024; (below, from left) Madassane tunes up; Moctar gets on the mike; Souleymane Ibrahim beats it out.

TUAREG DESERT BLUES ACE MDOU MOCTAR PREPARES TO PROTEST

"WOW, IT'S SO weird," says singer and guitar hero from Niger Mdou Moctar, eyeballing MOJO from his temporary base in Sweden. "I've never done a Zoom call before on my phone, I do it with Mikey's computers."

"He not only produced the band," quips also-present bassist and producer Mikey Coltun of himself, "he produced the Zoom calls too."

Even more exciting than videotelephony solutions, the pair's fertile creative chemistry reaches a new chapter with *Funeral For Justice*, their upcoming third collaboration after *Ilana: The Creator* (2019) and *Afrique Victime* (2021). Work began last summer after four months of gigging in Australia and North America, with five days in a "mostly unfurnished" house in upstate New York.

"It was very much similar to how we would have done it in Niger," says NY-based Coltun, whose Mustang bass collection hangs on the wall behind him, "with us sleeping on the floors, we're cooking, taking breaks, drinking tea, just drums in a room… 'studios' are not a big thing for Moctar or the band. Then I sat on the record for four to six months and re-amped all the guitars, getting the sounds right."

"I need freedom when I write this song or I record," says Moctar. "It's difficult in a studio because it's timing – you *have* to play because people are waiting for you. I don't feel good when I have that feeling. I prefer to be free – you're not stressed, you just play what you feel in your heart."

Coltun promises an "intense" album from a super-drilled band – completed by rhythm guitar/backing vocalist Ahmoudou Madassane and drummer Souleymane Ibrahim – of telepathic potency. "We kind of know what each other is going to play even before it happens," he says. "That's really what I wanted to capture on this record."

The intensity also comes in the songs' lyrics, inspired, as the title suggests, by the problems faced by African countries at the mercy of carnivore capitalism. "We have a lot of problems in Africa," says Moctar wearily. "The title means: justice does not exist in the world. Everyone tries to support the strong, not the weak. Africa has a lot of resources, gold, uranium, diamonds, but they are not in Africa. I feel this time is the same as the slave time, just now it's modern, now it's more crazy because now everyone is intelligent, they do it by purpose. When you read the texts, the messages, you're gonna see what we're talking about."

Yet even so, the parts MOJO have heard are forward-moving, living desert rock. Coltun compares it to the DIY punk scene he came up on, and Moctar agrees that there is solace to be found in it. "Music," he reflects, "it's better than guns. Because the gun kills, the music makes people happy, smiling not crying. It's because of that that I love the music."

Ian Harrison

> **"It's difficult in a studio… I prefer to be free."**
> **MDOU MOCTAR**

FACT SHEET

Title: *Funeral For Justice*

Due: late spring

Songs: Funeral For Justice/Sousoume Tamacheq/Modern Slaves

The Buzz: "Mikey [Coltun, producer] knows exactly what the band needs, because he was in Niger so many times. It's everything I need to have in an album, it's really different to the other albums I've made – it makes me very happy."
Mdou Moctar

ALSO WORKING

…**Black Sabbath**'s **TONY IOMMI** (right) has confirmed, "I've been working in the studio… I am writing and doing plenty of stuff, and it's sounding really good… I might use some orchestration" …scenes have emerged of **Can**'s **IRMIN SCHMIDT** with eyes clenched shut at the mixing desk, working on his new LP in an unidentified studio with long-time engineer **René Tinner** …**ANDRÉ 3000** told BBC 6 Music that he wants to work with **Sault**. "I've hung out [with them] in the studio here in LA before," he said. "We messed around and played a lot of music… we're hoping to do something a little bit more substantial, soon" …discussing his solo LP *The Banishing*, **Kavus Torabi** promises "a 'new' album by [**Steve Davis** collaboration] **THE UTOPIA STRONG** that you weren't expecting" …**NOEL GALLAGHER** told The Sun that he intends to record another album speedily to follow 2023's *Council Skies*. "In the pandemic there was nothing to do all day so I just wrote songs. There's another two albums' worth of material there," he said, adding that he was going back in the studio in January …Noel also appears on

THE BLACK KEYS' *Ohio Players*, out in April. "It's never taken us this long to make an album," says **Dan Auerbach**. "We took our time and did it right" …**Radiohead**'s **ED O'BRIEN** reports, "I'm deep into my next [solo] LP… it's been and continues to be a journey" …**DEAD CAN DANCE**'s **Lisa Gerrard** (left) and film composer **Marcello De Francisci** are working on new LP *The Poetry Of Life*…

Nelson Espinal (4), Getty (2)

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Bronx tales: Dion ups his game on new LP *Girl Friends*.

DION LIGHTS

Five DiMucci destroyers

1 **Jimmy Reed** *Baby What You Want Me To Do* (VEE-JAY, 1959)

2 **Bob Dylan** *A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall* (COLUMBIA, 1963)

3 **The Rolling Stones** *Honky Tonk Women* (DECCA, 1969)

4 **Robert Johnson** *Cross Road Blues* (VOCALION, 1937)

5 **Van Morrison** *Into The Mystic* (WARNER BROS, 1970)

Dion

The Wanderer talks tough women, rebellion and Louis Prima.

"I'M IN Florida and I have a T-shirt on." Dion DiMucci is 84 and feeling great. The Bronx-born rock'n'roll angel who transformed '50s and '60s music with his doo wop street group The Belmonts and such pop'n'roll slammers as The Wanderer and Runaround Sue is excited to talk about his new album *Girl Friends*, and its collaborations with blues, soul and folk luminaries including Susan Tedeschi, Carlene Carter and Maggie Rose. It's his third LP for Joe Bonamassa's Keeping The Blues Alive label, records that, in Dion's words, are all about "a total expression of joy and sorrow". "I started out my career strong," he says, "and I want to end it up strong."

Allison Michael Orenstein

You've picked some tough voices and mean guitarists to collaborate with. Does that say something about your perspective on women?

It's funny. When I was a kid, Paul Anka was singing "Put your head on my shoulder". I said, We gotta start singing about women with some *gravi-tass*! So I started putting songs together like Donna The Prima Donna and Runaround Sue. Independent women. I'll tell you something. When you're in a room and a beautiful woman walks in with the kind of talent that's on this record, man, the atmosphere changes. You. Up. Your. Game.

"I love talking to drunks."
DION

In the foreword to this album, Darlene Love says: "When I sang He's A Rebel I was singing about people like Dion."

When you're walking around in your own skin, you don't think of that stuff but, yeah, we were gangbusters. I was from the Bronx. I came out of a gang. We were like the rappers of the late '50s. Chuck Berry was writing about cars and schools and I was singing, "I was born to cry". But I was so insecure when I got to the record company they gave us songs like Teenager In Love to sing. Born To Cry wasn't a stretch. Teenager In Love *was* a stretch. But no one back then sat you down and said, "Think about what you really want to do." No, they just kept *telling* you what to do.

I suppose you at least had [producer] Tom Wilson at Columbia looking out for you.

I was the first rock'n'roller signed to Columbia. Tom had great sensibilities. He asked me about Bob Dylan because I used to go to all his early sessions. He asked, "What do you think if we put an electric band behind Dylan?" I thought Dylan would blow a fuse but Dylan went for it. Dylan was something to behold back then because it was like somebody let him out of a cage or something. He just exploded in there. It was unbelievable.

I read somewhere that your style of singing was influenced by Jewish cantors. Is that true?

In the Bronx there were Jewish neighbourhoods to the east and west of us. I was walking past the synagogue in Pelham Bay one day and heard this cantor. His name was Henry Rosenblatt. I walked in there because these were some ethereal kind of beautiful sounds. He brought me in the back and played me his father's records. His father was Yossele Rosenblatt and he was in [1927 film] The Jazz Singer as the Jewish Caruso. I went home and I wrote Born To Cry.

The other influence I wanted to ask you about was [Italian-American jazz and R&B singer] Louis Prima.

You know, if he didn't sing Italian songs he would have been the first guy in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Louis Prima resonated with me because he's a rhythm singer. I'm a rhythm singer. Everything he sang would land in the right place. Singers who try to get fancy bore me to death. I tried it once in the early '70s and when I hear those records now I want to hide under a rug.

Tell us something you've never told an interviewer before.

I love talking to drunks. I love talking to men who are drinking too much and looking for a way out. I've been doing that for 55 years. They think they're weak. But they're so strong. They're like self-will run riot. I just want them to understand that.

Andrew Male

Dion's new album Girl Friends is released on KTBA Records on March 8.

LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

JB Dunckel

The Air-man and solo pianist raves over Serge Gainsbourg's Histoire De Melody Nelson (Philips, 1971)

I was 18, 19, and my friends and I [in Paris] were listening to English and American music, T.Rex, Bowie, The Rolling Stones, The Cure, Television, Sisters Of Mercy… Then suddenly, we all discovered Serge Gainsbourg. For me, Étienne de Crécy, Alex Gopher, all French musicians of my generation, this was a really important moment, because for the first time we had our own amazing music and our own genius.

In the '80s, Serge Gainsbourg was still appearing on French TV, he would be dirty and smoking, sometimes drunk and yelling politically incorrect and misanthropic things. He burned a 500-franc bill to show how much tax he had to pay. We loved him – it's part of the French attitude to love people who are antagonistic. So, we'd listen to *Melody Nelson* in the dark, and smoke.

The record itself was so different, so experimental, a concept album. He was alone and searching for love at the time, and he met Jane Birkin, so the album is a mixture of real life and this poetic story about a romance between the narrator and the girl Melody Nelson, who dies in the end. You have rock'n'roll and jazz, and this massive free and wild orchestra arranged by Jean-Claude Vannier, and these jamming musicians and his almost spoken-word vocals. It was a new style.

Air were so influenced by him. La Femme d'Argent, the first track on [1998's] *Moon Safari*, the bass lines and the style of the music is inspired by *Melody Nelson*, it has the same kind of composition, with voices, a loop and an orchestra. We got to work with his daughter Charlotte on her album *5:55* which was fantastic, but we did not ask her about her father. That was taboo.

As told to Lois Wilson

JB Dunckel's solo piano debut Paranormal Musicality is out now on Warner Classic. Air's Moon Safari is reissued on Rhino on March 8.

THIS IS POST-PLAGUE POP? ST. VINCENT RETURNS WITH A NEW LP

LAST YEAR, St. Vincent channelled Portishead with The Roots on The Tonight Show, covered Bowie's Young Americans for the Love Rocks NYC charity, and sang Running Up That Hill to induct Kate Bush into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. This year, though, Annie Clark gets back to being herself, with the follow-up album to 2021's superb *Daddy's Home*. "Nobody knows anything about it yet," she says, composed and charismatic, down the line from Los Angeles. "You're the first person I've talked to, really, about it…"

Work began, she says, immediately after *Daddy's Home*. "Right after I finish a record, I like to start writing another one," she says. "You have a burst of creative output, like the boot is off your neck, once something is in the can, as it were… 'in the can' is like I'm thinking about film canisters, right? But that also could sound like something's in the toilet."

She worked in spaces including her own Compound Fracture studio in LA, Electric Lady in New York and Steve Albini's Electrical Audio in Chicago. It was, she says, her first purely self-produced set. "I needed to go deeper in finding my own sonic vocabulary," she says. "I like to think of [the record] as post-plague pop, it's a lot about heaven and hell – the metaphorical kinds. Which is appropriate, because sitting alone in a studio for that many hours I would say is a version of hell."

She's tight-lipped on song-specifics, but confirms that contributing musicians include Dave Grohl, Cate Le Bon and Josh Freese ("a pretty tight little Wrecking Crew"). One song, she reveals, is "written from the point of view of a deep narcissistic injury, of being slighted… just walking down the street and feeling like an absolute powder keg, like if somebody looks at you the wrong way you could explode."

> **"It sounds urgent and psychotic… there's nothing cute about it."**
> ST. VINCENT

Was this mindset, wonders MOJO, engendered by the "post-plague"/Covid malaise? "I think so," she says. "That kind of isolation breeds paranoia and loneliness, and loneliness can breed violence. It's been a time of loss collectively and personally. [But] loss and death are very clarifying things, they make everything that doesn't fucking matter go away."

It seems the soundworld of the album, which features '70s and '80s analogue synths and "lots of guitars", is also on the edge. "It sounds urgent and psychotic, in equal parts the most caustic sound and also, I think, the most sonically blooming," says Clark. "It's high stakes and intentional."

Suitably for a serial self-reinventor, it sounds something of a departure from the warped '70s fantasias of *Daddy's Home*. "The last record, I was approaching tough subjects with a lot of biting humour and wit," Clark says. "I put on a wig, I was prancing around, it was so fun. This record is darker and harder and more close to the bone. I'd say it's my least funny record yet! There's nothing cute about it."

Is she concerned that she might alienate anyone? "I have tremendous faith in human beings," she says. "The door is totally open. Let's just talk and go there together. If they don't want to, that's fine too… I think it's the best thing I've ever done. It's a record that basically talks about how life is impossible, but yet we get to live it – or, we might as well."

Ian Harrison

Two faced: St. Vincent's back in the studio.

Leah Lehrer, Pascal Arnaud, Getty

Teddy bears pick Nick: Saloman, AKA The Bevis Frond, in the late-'80s, and still growing now.

GARAGE-PSYCH STORMTROOPER THE BEVIS FROND PEAKS... AT 70

ONE OF Britain's most gifted torchbearers for psychedelia, Nick Saloman has had his latest Bevis Frond LP on in the car – and that's a very positive sign. "I don't usually do that," he explains, "but this one I'm still able to listen to. Like, Ooh, this is actually quite good, isn't it?"

Called *Focus On Nature*, this latest outing is his twenty-fifth in 37 years, and it's right up there with his best. Despite a glorious way with melody, and extraordinary abilities as a lead guitarist, however, east Londoner Saloman has always operated beneath the radar, but for an obsessive cult following, which includes fellow tunesmiths Teenage Fanclub, Evan Dando and Mary Lou Lord.

"The great thing is that I've been largely unsuccessful," he beams from his Hastings abode. "This way, I haven't got the pressure. When bands make it, they have to do long tours, then they fall out and end up not having time or enthusiasm. Whereas I can concentrate on every record I make."

The Bevis Frond was one of Saloman's first group's names, formed when he was 15 in 1968. Although he later led ill-fated combos Oddsocks, Room 13 and the Von Trap Family ("we were too old for punk, but The Stranglers were older"), by '87 he'd had umpteen ghastly label experiences and given up the ghost. Using compensation money from a motorbike accident, he self-recorded what he calls "a farewell vanity album called *Miasma*, so I had something to give to an uninterested grandchild, and say, This is what I was about." He played all the instruments himself, but reverted to his first band's name "so it looked more convincing."

There began a deluge of Bevis long-players, which only abated circa '04 for seven years when his mum died and he relocated. After working as co-writer for superfan Mary Lou's albums in 1998-2004, he dipped a toe in professional songcraft, but withdrew when offered a team-up with Megadeth's Dave Mustaine.

"The music I rarely deviate from," he clarifies, "is melodic guitar-based rock with bits of punk, folk, West Coast, and British psych. What has changed, I think, is the lyrical content, because I'm now 70. If I started going, 'Aw baby, I wanna make it with you,' I'd sound like a pervert."

So, 2021's *Little Eden* examined the cracks in broken Britain, while *Focus On Nature* urgently responds to the climate crisis, also admitting, on The Hug, that every rock survivor craves "a little bit of recognition."

Peaking in his eighth decade, Saloman wrote 300 songs last year, whittled them down to the 19 on the album ("I'm a strict editor"), and already has 25 ready for his next double LP. "I'd knock it on the head if I thought the quality had noticeably dropped, but at the moment," he concludes with a grin, "it's definitely not getting any worse."

Andrew Perry

TRIP TYCH

Bevis's freakiest three.

Miasma
(WORONZOW, 1987)

Saloman cut this inaugural Bevis LP as his final shot, and the lo-fi home recordings duly have a febrile energy, touching as many stylistic bases as possible, with blistering solos filling every sonic crevice.

New River Head
(WORONZOW, 1991)

Saloman's eighth album in five years was outstanding, an out-of-time classic taking an assured route through garage-psych nuggets, folky whimsy and Neil Young-worthy guitar meltdowns. Befitting of anti-matter rock royalty.

Focus On Nature
(FIRE, 2024)

After unavoidably creating *Little Eden* on his tod during lockdown, Saloman reconnected with his live band for this joyfully full-blooded septuagenarian romp. Every song's memorably catchy and full with meaning.

> "The great thing is, I've been largely unsuccessful..."
> **NICK SALOMAN**

Courtesy Nick Saloman/Reckless Records

Plenty more to come: Nick Saloman on a natural high.

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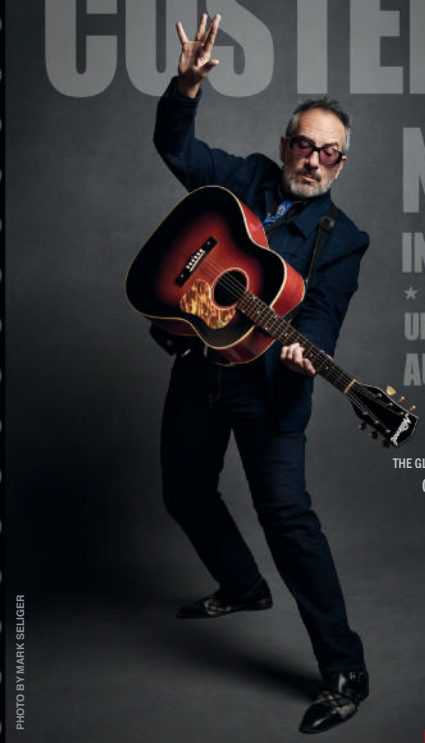

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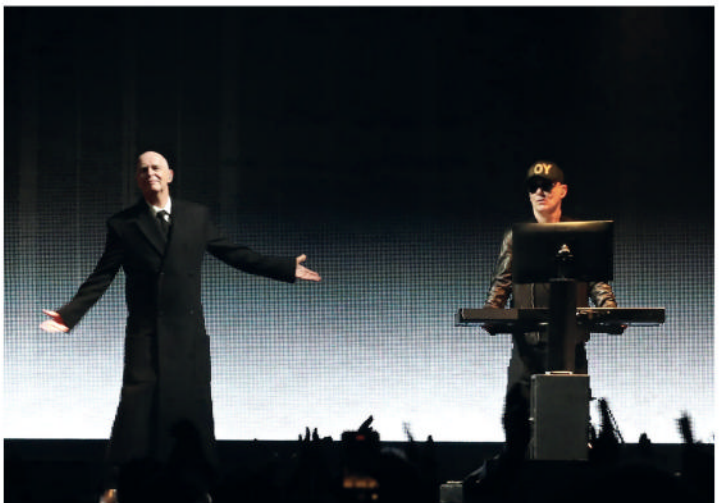

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> "There was a wildfire burning maybe 10 miles away, smoke in the sky all day and night."
> **KAYLA COHEN**

Nocturnal emissions: Itasca's Kayla Cohen enhances dream-state atmospheres.

THE "URGENT NIGHTTIME" ELECTRIC FOLK SOUNDS OF KAYLA COHEN AND ITASCA

"I'M NOT that big a fan of the spotlight," says Kayla Cohen, in a suitably quiet and hesitant voice. "I don't know why I choose to do this thing that has a necessity to be in the spotlight, but I really want people to listen to the music and put their own story in there."

The 32-year-old Los Angeles-based guitarist, singer and songwriter, who records as Itasca, is speaking from a friend's house in British Columbia where she is currently pet-sitting (three dogs, a cat and two ducks) and revisiting the circumstances behind the making of her new album, the quietly powerful electric folk odyssey that is *Imitation Of War*.

"We finished mixing in May of 2022," says Cohen. "The album was originally inspired by [the 1969 Éric Rohmer film] My Night At Maud's. At the centre of the film is a long scene where the two main characters talk to each other in a bedroom at night. It's sort of a dance, they're figuring out who they are. Then a couple of weeks later, a friend used the term "imitation of war" [to describe relationships] and I was like, Oh, it just fits so well, for the way we operate with each other, but also the way we imitate people we've seen. That's how we grow. You imitate, then you assimilate it into your own being and become more yourself."

It's also how Itasca have evolved, this classically trained guitarist from upstate New York moving from the weird, runic songcraft of the self-released *Grace Riders On The Road* in 2012, to the gauzy baroque folk ballads of 2014's *Unmoored By The Wind*, and on through her first two full-band releases on the Paradise Of Bachelors label, 2016's *Open To Chance* and 2019's *Spring*.

"The first few felt unmoored," says Cohen. "These weird artefacts of pure isolation when I was listening to private-press acoustic people. Then the next two were me trying to find my footing. So yeah, imitating other styles and trying to see what fits. This new one feels more me but it's evolved out of playing for so long with these people who've become close friends." Specifically, on *Imitation Of War*, they are Wand rhythm section Evan Backer and Evan Burrows and Gun Outfit drummer Daniel Swire. At ease and at home with this group, Cohen herself sounds like an artist reborn, also thanks to her swapping out her old acoustic for a solid-body Gibson SG.

Previous Itasca albums have been imbued with a sense of place. *Spring* was informed by the history of Chaco Canyon, a 12th century Native American architectural complex where Cohen was living at the time. Similarly, *Imitation Of War* is informed, in part, by the California wildfires of 2020. "I was recording with Gun Outfit in a house in the Sierras," explains Cohen. "There was a wildfire burning maybe 10 miles away, smoke in the sky all day and night, this atmosphere of urgent nighttime all the time."

That atmosphere of "urgent nighttime", a nocturnal in-the-red atmosphere of sonic decay, runs throughout *Imitation Of War*. "Almost becoming distorted but not quite," says Cohen. It's a mood that enhances the dream-state atmosphere that's inhabited all of Itasca's LPs, a hazy, in-between world that allows the listener to lose the sense and meaning of the lyrics and get lost in the music as if caught in a waking dream. "That's my hope of what people will hear in this record," says Cohen. "Yesterday I went into the woods and followed someone's footsteps for three miles. I didn't see anyone, you're just in the rhythm in the moment. I'm trying to put that feeling into words and sound."

Andrew Male

Itasca's Imitation Of War is out now on Paradise Of Batchelors.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Tiny Ruins, Wand, Sibylle Baier, Espers
- Cohen has been studying ecopsychology, "changing the way people interact with nature in order to help climate change. It covers everything from taking groups of people on hikes to academic articles about how to transform your own psyche whilst being in the woods."
- Two of Cohen's main influences for *Imitation Of War* were the first Thin Lizzy LP from 1971 and early medieval music. "With early music it's about trying to find ways to transcend our daily lives – what better way is there than to listen to something that was written 600 years ago?"

KEY TRACKS

- Imitation Of War
- Milk
- Tears On Sky Mountain

Courtesy Kayla Cohen

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AMBIENT JAZZ FIXER CARLOS NIÑO TAKES US – AND ANDRÉ 3000! – ON A JOURNEY THROUGH THE SECRET LIFE OF PLANTS

CARLOS NIÑO has a thing about plants. "I collect from people's green bins, things that have fallen from trees, seeds and pods, to make sound," he explains from his home in Topanga, California. "I'm not just playing rhythm, not just playing percussion, it's an additional specificity. If a big strand of a palm tree falls on the road, I might turn it into something musical."

It's a musical approach that Niño has recently brought to ex-Outkast rapper André 3000's celestial flute opus *New Blue Sun* and to South African singer/pianist Thandi Ntuli's spiritually-charged breakthrough *Rainbow Revisited*. But it's most pronounced on his Carlos Niño & Friends project, an ongoing odyssey that stitches together the best improvisations from a rotating cast of pals including Shabaka Hutchings, Kamasi Washington, Miguel Atwood-Ferguson and Laraaji. "There's a legacy of artists I love who release a lot of music – Madlib, Knowledge, Keith Jarrett, Vangelis, Brian Eno. I'm definitely in that zone," says Niño of a multi-tasking creative life that incorporates roles as percussive linchpin, cosmic guide, vibe controller and conceptualist to the stars.

After establishing himself on LA radio as a teenager, Niño first broke cover as half of instrumental hip-hoppers AmmonContact in the early 2000s: "It wasn't the most progressive music, but we were trying to get to something." Niño's utopian fusion of hip-hop, New Age, ambient and jazz took shape while he worked with singer Dwight Trible in Build An Ark, but his music shifted gears in the early 2010s. "That's when I started playing live and expressing myself outside the studio," he says. "I wanted to see if can make records the way I'm hearing them. I don't really have any rules or organised ideas, I'm just constantly making music in a variety of ways."

> "I collect seeds and pods from people's green bins to make sound."
> CARLOS NIÑO

Niño's process is at its most free-roaming on forthcoming LP *Placenta*, a warm and personal meditation on the birth of his son Moss that climaxes with a 17-minute rewiring of Kerri Chandler's deep house anthem Rain. The sequencing is important. "I'm really into the whole detailed tapestry of an album. I'm reporting my thoughts, feelings and experiences in sound form, for people to have their own interactions with. It's an awesome exchange." Working with Niño proved fruitful for Ntuli on *Rainbow Revisited*, after he initially approached her on Instagram. "It sparked a series of conversations that led to us finally meeting in person," says Ntuli, who recorded her parts in just two afternoons. "It was very improvisational, more like a live performance." She also praises his percussive touch. "It's more layering than purely rhythmic. The pulse is there, but it's not overtly stated. He made a huge contribution."

Effusive in conversation, it's easy to understand how Niño gets the best out of his collaborators. "I'm a spiritual being," he concludes. "I feel I'm making a contribution towards a higher, harmonic, celebratory realisation of our greater potential."

Andy Cowan

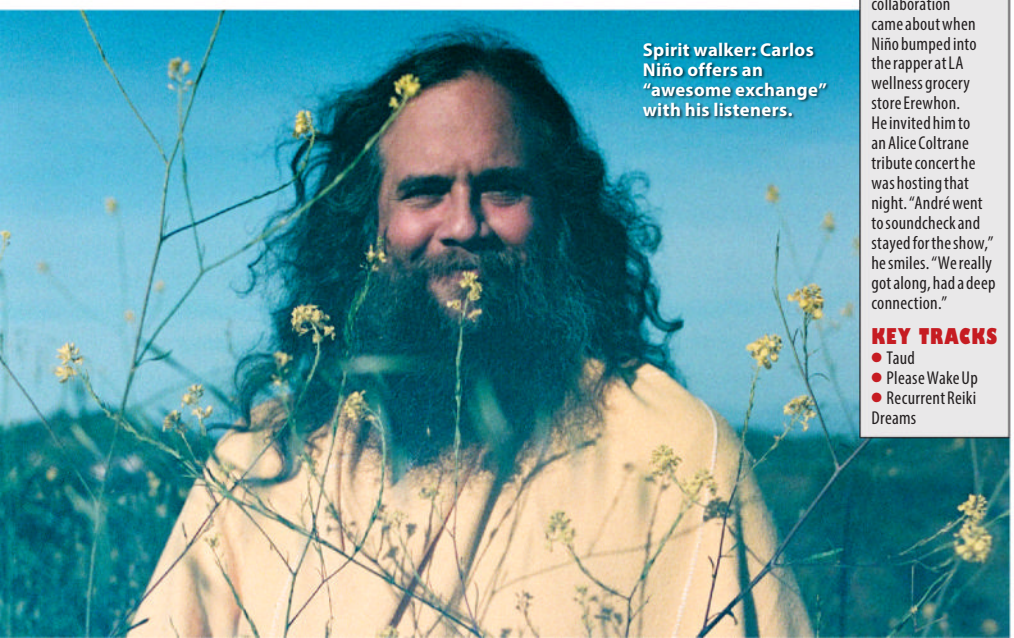
Placenta is out May 24 on International Anthem.

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Iasos, Bill Laswell, Photay
- Niño got his start in radio in 1995 on Los Angeles station KPFK. His musically diverse Spaceways Radio show started in 1999, featuring guests such as Yusef Lateef, Pharoah Sanders and Gil Scott-Heron.
- Despite a platinum Rolodex, Niño's list of dream collaborators is long. It includes Q-Tip, Egberto Gismonti, Jowee Omicil, Thomas Mapfumo and Esperanza Spalding.
- The André 3000 collaboration came about when Niño bumped into the rapper at LA wellness grocery store Erewhon. He invited him to an Alice Coltrane tribute concert he was hosting that night. "André went to soundcheck and stayed for the show," he smiles. "We really got along, had a deep connection."

KEY TRACKS

- Taud
- Please Wake Up
- Recurrent Reiki Dreams



Spirit walker: Carlos Niño offers an "awesome exchange" with his listeners.

MOJO PLAYLIST

Turn onto the month's best garage R&B, samba fuzz and blue country.

1 PHOSPHORESCENT REVELATOR
Lulling currents and pedal steel accompany Matthew Houck's lovelorn balancing of the Zen ideal versus awkward actuality: when he sings, "I don't even like what I like any more," it hits.
Find it: *YouTube*

2 JANE WEAVER PERFECT STORM
Crystalline Kraut-synths pulsate warmly, as Weaver ambivalently suggests "let's try and make amends."
Find it: *Bandcamp*

3 SAHRA HALGAN SHARAF
Somaliland-via-France singer meets fuzz guitars and Farfisa organs for rock'n'roll grind and chug. From the album of the same name, out now.
Find it: *Bandcamp*

4 MARK KNOPFLER AHEAD OF THE GAME
From new LP *One Deep River*, easy country rock with a hint of blue, reflecting on the life of the jobbing musician – is this how the Sultans Of Swing felt?
Find it: *streaming services*

5 VAMPIRE WEEKEND GEN-X COPS
A blue-skied, '80s AOR yang to also-out companion track Capricorn's more autumnal yin; artful pop demonstrative of their considerable studio nous.
Find it: *streaming services*

6 BILLY JOEL TURN THE LIGHTS BACK ON
His first song since 2007, his piano and still-supple vocal chords bend to a ballad of asked forgiveness.
Find it: *streaming services*

7 LEYLA McCALLA TREE
Haitian-American songwriter imagines an unloved woman turning herself into a tree. Swaying samba heats up to a rebellious howl of Tropicália fuzz guitar.
Find it: *streaming services*

8 PET SHOP BOYS LONELINESS
With orchestra and mournful mid-range electro-bosh, PSB burnish their synth-Smiths credentials with a stark cry of the forsaken.
Find it: *streaming services*

9 US BLACK SHEEP
Fresh Finnish five-piece play speed-limit-breaking loopoid punk-R&B with gob iron. From their new single Night Time, out now.
Find it: *Krautpop! CD single*

10 BURIAL DREAMFEAR
The south London mysterio, still trapped in a rainy subway listening to vintage hardcore ghost frequencies.
Find it: *streaming services/XL 12-inch*

Todd Weaver, Curtis Wayne Millard

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Miles and Duke were his parents' pals, **'Romeo Blue'** his **Bowie-ish** false start. And, 35 years since **his beguiling debut,** the records show that he's always been **more** than a **fashion plate.** "I've used my gifts to **amplify love,"** says **Lenny Kravitz.**

Interview by **JOHN AIZLEWOOD** • Portrait by **MATHIEU BITTON**

"WE HAVE COWS."

It's a glorious California morning, but Lenny Kravitz's mind is in Brazil, specifically the former coffee plantation outside Rio de Janeiro that he's transformed into a farm.

"We do bamboo, eucalyptus, coffee and most of the fruit and vegetables that grow in the state of Rio. We don't eat the cows, of course," he adds. "We just let them graze, eat grass and live."

Rather like his cows, for the 35 years since his debut album *Let Love Rule* catapulted him to instant European fame and eventual American renown, Kravitz has grazed and lived. There's been grass too.

For the past month, however, he's been in Los Angeles, fine-tuning his twelfth album, the sparkling *Blue Electric Light*, the longest album of his career and one which distils almost all that is good about Lenny Kravitz.

Soon, he'll be at the Golden Globes where his trombone-drenched Road To Freedom – from Rustin, the biopic of gay civil rights activist Bayard Rustin – will lose out in the Best Original Song category to a Billie Eilish tune from Barbie. Right now, though, he can't sit still. Sunglasses go on. He sits in the sun. He goes to get some water. Sunglasses go off. On his return, the sun has moved on. "Where's the sunniest spot?" he wonders.

Kravitz, now 59, has always been restless. Raised in New York by Sy Kravitz, his television producer, Russian-Jewish father ("actually they were from Kyiv, so they'd be Ukrainian Jews now") and his African-American-Bahamian mother, the actress Roxie Roker, he flitted between his maternal grandparents in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant, where Lenny was Eddie, and the family home in uptown Manhattan, where Lenny was Lennie.

When her boy was 10, Roxie secured a lead role on the groundbreaking interracial comedy The Jeffersons and the pair decamped to Los Angeles. He joined the California Boys Choir (his first gig: Mahler's third with the LA Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl), briefly became Romeo Blue and began the journey to *Let Love Rule*, loosely based around his relationship with Cosby Show actor Lisa Bonet and the arrival of their daughter, Zoë.

Eleven always varied, mostly excellent, sometimes boundary-pushing albums later, Kravitz is a global superstar with sidelines in design, painting, brand endorsements and acting. In the autumn, he'll take a break from the *Blue Electric Light* world tour to make an as-yet unnamed film about a fictional musician.

"I'm enjoying it more than ever," he insists. "I'm hungrier and more inspired than I've ever been. I see a lot of people, friends even, who're not pleased any more, not inspired any more. They've become jaded and burnt out. That's not where I am. I have a fire underneath me that's greater than ever."

What's your first musical memory?

A Tchaikovsky symphony. I can't remember ➢

WE'RE NOT WORTHY

GN'Rs' **Duff McKagan** lets his Len love rule.

"When Lenny's first record came out it was Slash and my favourite record to – how should I put this – be with a beautiful woman! Then we met Lenny when he opened for Tom Petty and we just gelled. He sang on my first solo album and we've always hung out. It's a mutual respect thing."

Mathieu Bitton, Alamy

which one, but I had this toy, Show 'N Tell, a plastic TV set-looking thing with a record player on top. You stuck a slide in, watched the screen and heard the music. I'd sing along to this Tchaikovsky number. Then it was Jackson 5, Motown, Curtis Mayfield, Al Green, R&B, soul, jazz, Miles Davis, Coltrane, Parker, Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Kenny Burrell, Wes Montgomery and gospel. You see, when my parents went out, they took me with them. They could have left me at home, but I got to see and hear all this great music and theatre.

Given your parents' jobs and roles as night people, your upbringing could have been feral.

It could, but it wasn't. I come from a life of discipline. My mum gave me loving discipline and the values of hard work. From my dad, there was militaristic discipline.

How does an infant cope with seeing their mum on-stage, being different people every night?

It was surreal to see her playing these characters when I was at a very young age. I was like, Who's that? It was amazing to watch her transform into somebody else, but that's how I grew up.

Few five-year-olds have Duke Ellington sing Happy Birthday to them…

To me it was normal. He was just this nice guy with a white suit, slicked back silver hair and a goatee who was a friend of my parents. When I saw him play on my fifth birthday, his orchestra stopped playing. He said, "There's a young man in the audience and it's his birthday…" Then, I'm sat on his lap and they start playing Happy Birthday. Only years later, did I go, Wow… I didn't realise what an education I was having.

And seeing the Jackson 5 at Madison Square Garden as a six-year-old changed your life…

Absolutely. They blew my mind. Their singles were the first records I had. I knew the orchestrations, I knew the words, I knew everything. From that day forwards, nothing was the same.

Did you have trouble establishing your own personal and racial identity?

I didn't, which is quite the marvel. I had no understanding of prejudice, no understanding that having different skin tones meant something more than the visual. I was in a household with every colour, every background, every religion, so I thought that's what human beings were. I'm Jewish, I'm Bahamian, I'm from Europe, the Caribbean and the American South, and we celebrated all our holidays, all our traditions. I didn't know there was an issue until other kids told me. Then I became confused, but my mother taught me to celebrate everything I was. It was a beautiful way to grow up.

You were an accidental sponge?

I would agree. That's why the music isn't in a box. It's an accumulation of everything.

Your middle name, Albert, is a tribute to your maternal grandfather. How did he shape your life?

Albert Roker was a great example of growing in life, a person who was open to change and open to learning. At nine years of age, he had to become the man of the household, because his father died. He had to support four siblings and an ailing mother, so he never got to finish school. He became this philosopher, this self-educated person, who was always taking classes, reading and learning. He wasn't an 'I know best' grandad. Instead, he would say, "This is the best way I know and I'll teach it to you, but when you find a better way, you teach me." He's why I always feel like there's a new life every day.

Miles Davis didn't hang out with many pre-teens did he?

To everyone else, he must have been 'Miles Davis', but to me this guy was the husband of Cicely Tyson, my mum's best friend and my godmother. I knew he played the trumpet, but I didn't know what he stood for: it must have been weird for him. I just liked the way he spoke to me: (*uncannily accurate impersonation*) "Lenny… how you doin'?" When I met people at high school who idolised him, I was, Oh shit…

How did moving to Los Angeles affect this New York boy?

I discovered rock, but the key factor was joining the California Boys Choir from 11 to 15 as a first – and then second – alto. I learned to sight-read – which I've completely lost – to sing phonetically in 15 languages, and via osmosis I was taking in orchestration, counterpoint and harmony, but not realising what I'm going to do with it.

When did you commit yourself to music?

I sort of knew from a small child, but in high school I had a dream: I'd play in a club or restaurant while I'd have a girlfriend with a typewriter who was a writer. But I was a stone-cold New Yorker and I missed it. After high school, cheap air travel meant I could travel back and forth. In New York I became the guy who helped others develop their sound. You could come to me with a framework of a song and because I could play all the instruments, I'd help you finish it. I was happy being a guitarist. I wasn't writing and I'd no thoughts of being a solo artist.

Why on earth did you become Romeo Blue?

I was very insecure about my name. I thought 'Lenny Kravitz' was the most un-rock'n'roll name you could have. Some friends gave me the nickname Romeo which was silly. I added the Blue to it and became this Romeo Blue character. He was very odd: a mix of David Bowie, Prince and Rick James. He had the hairdo, wore the thrift store clothes and he had the blue contact lenses, but I felt like I was hiding the real me. I got to a place where it was, Fuck this, I'm gonna take my name and deal

A LIFE IN PICTURES

It ain't over: Lenny through the years.

1 Open mike: little Len singing into his Grandpa Joe's tape recorder in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, NY.

2 The player: Lenny with parents Sy Kravitz and Roxie Roker at home in Santa Monica, CA, 1976.

3 Letting love rule: Kravitz with wife Lisa Bonet and daughter Zoë, New York City, September 29, 1989.

4 "Europe was hipper": Kravitz enjoys a London hang with Terence Trent D'Arby and Neneh Cherry, 1989.

5 D'oh my way: Lenny takes his place on Homer Simpson's rock'n'roll fantasy sofa alongside (from left) Elvis Costello, Tom Petty, Keith Richards, Mick Jagger and Brian Setzer, 2002.

6 All locked up: Kravitz on-stage at the Paradiso, Amsterdam, 1995.

7 Class act: Kravitz making his movie debut alongside Gabourey Sidibe in the Academy Award-nominated Precious, 2009.

8 Road to freedom: with Angela Bassett at the Golden Globe Awards, Beverly Hills, January 7, 2024.

9 "An accumulation of everything": Kravitz, 1989.

Courtesy of Lenny Kravitz (2), Getty (5), Alamy (2)

with it. Romeo Blue was part of finding myself. He led me back to me.

Romeo Blue almost got a deal though, didn't he?

When the music started coming to me, I spent my college money on making demos, which blew my parents' minds. I ended up getting listened to by Miles Copeland, the brother of Police drummer Stewart who had IRS Records. He wanted to sign me and I was so excited. But he didn't want me to produce myself, he wanted Martin Rushent, this English guy who'd produced The Human League's *Dare* and, for IRS, The Go-Go's. I brought my dad to the meeting. Miles also wanted my publishing, but my dad said, "Absolutely not". Things were getting a little heated between Miles and my dad and it ended with me thinking my dad's fucked up my record deal. But he knew exactly what he was doing. He wasn't a lawyer, but he knew enough about the record business and publishing. I appreciated that, but not until later.

Weren't you almost in the black Duran Duran?

A&M wanted four cute young black guys with a European sound. They offered all this money and the chance to make an album in Europe. At the time, a shitty Ford Escort which I rented for $4.99 a day was both my car and my house, but when it came to sign, something in my spirit would not let me do it. The other guys were mad at me because I'd blown the deal and the band fell through. It was utterly ridiculous. The record company guy thinks I'm an idiot – *I* think I'm an idiot – but I walked out of it forever.

As *Let Love Rule* developed, so did the dreadlocks…

An accident. Honest to God this is the truth: when I moved in with Lisa Bonet – as friends at first – I brought my guitars and keyboards, but I forgot my comb. Next thing I know, dreadlocks were forming. I remember saying to Lisa, I've got to cut them out. She was, "No, no, no, they look great." *Let Love Rule* was simply everything me and Lisa talked about.

After you signed to Virgin America as Lenny Kravitz, what kind of pop star did you want to be?

I had no idea. I had the music but I hadn't performed yet. Romeo Blue was a persona and while I played on-stage with people, I never did a show as Romeo Blue. I had no plan.

> "I was **very insecure** about my name. **I thought** 'Lenny Kravitz' was **the most un-rock'n'roll name** you could have."

Why did you break in Europe before the US?

America was very formatted and my music wasn't black enough or white enough. Europe was hipper. Virgin sent me to London and put me up at the Pembridge Court Hotel, a bed and breakfast run by two ladies. I did all the promotion they asked and I was in heaven. I played the Borderline early on and Terence Trent D'Arby, Neneh Cherry and Jazzie B all showed up. I didn't think about not being accepted in America. I knew nothing. It's quite beautiful to look back and think how innocent I was.

You started collaborating straight away. A year after *Let Love Rule*, you and Ingrid Chavez wrote Justify My Love for Madonna…

Oh, I knew that track wasn't for me. I'd met Madonna out in the clubs and we used to have fun. I called her and said, I have a Number 1 song for you. She said, "No you don't." I jumped in a cab with my cassette. She's very playful and funny, and says, "Where's my Number 1 song?" I played it twice. She says, "Let's record it," although she wouldn't come to Hoboken where I was recording. It was her biggest hit for many, many, many, many years. When the Jean-Baptiste Mondino video was banned by MTV, the label sold it as a video cassette and it exploded. People were lined up around the block buying these things.

The second LP, *Mama Said*, was born of depression, wasn't it?

I love that album, but yes it was. Life gave me what it took to make that record and it was a beautiful experience, but there was a lot of darkness. I was going through the break-up with Lisa. I wasn't sleeping, I wasn't eating, but making *Mama Said* helped me cope with the darkness.

Slash and Sean Lennon are on there…

Slash was my high school buddy, but Sean's like my little brother. I met him when Yoko came to a show in Geneva. She really liked me and I ended up becoming friends with her and the family. Sean was in the studio hallway playing the piano. He said he was just messing about, but the chords became All I Ever Wanted. I love the *Mama Said* album: it's very raw.

Where did that riff to Are You Gonna Go My Way come from?

It happened in five minutes. In 1992, I was in Paris making the *Are You Gonna Go My Way* ➢

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"Being on the road can be treacherous, but I take really good care of myself": Lenny Kravitz walks it like he talks, New York, 2023.

© Mark Seliger

"I'm **literally grounded** since I don't **wear shoes:** my feet are **in the dirt,** on the beach or **in the jungle.**"

album and Vanessa Paradis' album [*Vanessa Paradis*] at the same time. She'd just made an LP with Serge Gainsbourg and might have done another, but he'd died. When I was asked, I didn't know who she was, but I took the gig. I'd do my stuff during the day and her's after five. One day, the studio people are clearing up our stuff. Vanessa's waiting outside and me and Craig Ross, my guitarist and partner, were just jamming around, me on drums, him on guitar. All of a sudden, we hit something. I said, Wait a minute, let's record that. We did it in one take and I wrote some lyrics the following morning. I knew I dug it. I knew there was an energy but it was so raw and so nasty, a beautiful mess at a time when everything on the radio was very produced and very clean.

You worked with Mick Jagger on two of his solo albums. Did you feel he was a bit lost without the Stones?

No, no, no. Mick enjoyed his solo time. For him, it was a holiday. We collaborated on Bill Withers' Use Me for [1993's] *Wandering Spirit*, but we wrote God Gave Me Everything on *Goddess In The Doorway* [2001]. I had the melody, but no words apart from a bit of chorus. He came to my Roxie studio in Miami. I mumbled some words. He took a pen and paper and 30 minutes later had the lyrics. He goes into the vocal booth and starts singing from top to bottom perfectly. I say, My God, that was amazing, and he says, "We'll get the real vocal later." He tried over and over again. Of course we used the original.

Was 1995's *Circus* the closest you've come to all-out rock?

Well, it's got a lot of heaviness and dirginess. I hadn't changed but circumstances around me and people's reactions to me had. As opposed to being Lenny Kravitz, I was 'Lenny Kravitz'. I was getting extravagant, renting chateaus in France to record, jet-setting, having a relationship with Vanessa. I'd leave the chateau, drive two hours to Paris and party. People weren't happy with me. On top of that, my mother was fighting cancer and she was coming over to hang out. I was all over the place. The result is a fan favourite. For the real fans, *Circus* is the one. Making it was cathartic, but then my mum passed and I had to be on the road in five days. Interesting times.

You started on the 'Funk' album, the great lost Lenny Kravitz LP, while you were working on *Circus*. Any sign of it yet?

Oh, it's still to come out. Some people still think those songs became *Baptism* [2004], but that's not the case at all. I wasn't having a good time making *Circus*. I thought, Fuck it, I'm taking a break. I went to New Orleans with Craig. I've always loved New Orleans' architecture, food, music and history: it doesn't feel like the US. We saw Aretha Franklin from the side of the stage, we started hanging out in clubs every night, drinking, eating, partying and sitting in with bands. Then, as I'd saved some money up, I bought a house from a woman of colour on Dauphine Street in the French quarter. The wood was old, funky and mystical, so I knew it was mine. Now I wanted to make music.

The 'Funk' album?

Exactly. I rented Allen Toussaint's Sea-Saint studio, where The Meters, Professor Longhair and Earl King had recorded. That was the beginning of *The Funk Album*.

What happened?

It wasn't finished, so I put it away. In 2004, I pulled it out again and I've kept adding to it and moulding it ever since. It's long: a double/triple LP. What's interesting is that it's a record of many versions of myself now. It's going to come out.

When, Len?

Er, I don't actually know. After the next album? Or the one after that?

Working with Michael Jackson must have felt like completing the circle which began in Madison Square Garden?

Michael was doing *Invincible* and John McClain at his label asked if I had anything for "Mike". I hadn't, but I immediately wrote (I Can't Make It) Another Day, played all the instruments and did a guide vocal. Michael came into the studio. While I play music loud, he played it louder than anything I've ever heard. He said he loved it and started dancing. He did the vocal straight away and insisted I stop him if it wasn't right. My head's going back to when I was six years old at MSG, but we're just two guys working. When he said, "I haven't had this much fun since Quincy," I took at as the biggest compliment of my career.

Why didn't it make *Invincible*?

John thought it was too jarring for a groovy mellow record with Butterflies and those beautiful songs. Then Michael died. A decade on, (I Can't Make It) Another Day appeared on *Michael*, which was an, um, interesting album. I wish it had been on *Invincible*.

After eight albums, 2008's *It Is Time For A Love Revolution* finally gave you an American Top 5 album. Everybody knew Lenny Kravitz, so why so long?

I actually didn't know that. My records are slow growers, which I'm good with. I don't follow the trends, I'm not trying to make commercial music. I could have done. I could have been, Right, I'm gonna go for hits. But I've always done what I wanted, taken the time to grow and experiment, whether people dig it or not. I'm in this for the long haul. Some people do a big explosion and leave, either by dying or stopping. That's not me. I'm just getting started.

2011's *Black And White America, Raise Vibration* seven years later and *Blue Electric Light* are Bahamas albums. Doesn't a place so laid-back stifle creativity?

No, no, no, no. It enhances creativity. I'm an antenna: I pick up what's floating around. I don't wake up, get a coffee and go to work. I don't live that way. I wait until I hear something which can come in a dream, or sitting, or walking around and the Bahamas is great for that. I'm literally grounded since I don't wear shoes: my feet are in the dirt, on the beach or in the jungle. I live a very basic life there and it's quiet. It's a place where I can hear.

On *Blue Electric Light* you're still singing about love, but you've never been as poppy as on Human…

I was two years into a three-year tour when the planet shut down. I do not say this lightly because I understand people were sick and people died, but for me it was a blessing. Time was suddenly an open concept and I had not experienced anything like that since I was a child. I was in the Bahamas in a bubble of eight including Craig. Apart from not being able to see my daughter Zoë for two years – she was in London making The Batman – I was in the best physical, mental and spiritual place of my life. I spent time in prayer and meditation and it was phenomenal. It was a re-boot of my life.

Did you get creative?

I made four albums' worth of music. There are threads – it's me, it's my voice, my sensibilities, my playing, my producing *et cetera, et cetera* – but I never repeated myself. I don't do anything twice. I'm not able to do that for some reason. I'm never the same human being as I was a couple of years ago. This means that every LP is a completely new life for me, a new way of doing things, hearing things and playing. When you listen to all the albums in a row, from sonics to songwriting and production, they're all different.

Do you feel critically under-valued?

First of all, I don't need validation. I'm not that person. I know who I am. I know what I do and I feel good about it. Then I look at the people gravitating towards me, from Michael Jackson to Mick Jagger – they all called me, remember – the legendary folk who supported me and I know they get it. I could name 50 of them. That's my validation.

Do your extra-curricular activities – design, acting, etc – get in the way of the music?

I wouldn't think so. Whether I'm taking photos, designing, landscaping or painting, music is the nucleus: that's what I breathe and that's what gives me life. But look, Kravitz Design is serious: we've made the Architectural Digest Top 100 for three years in a row. I'm just as passionate about designing as music. I love it – it's another medium in which I get to express myself. When I come back to other things, there's more energy.

Does that make you immune to the music industry's financial downturn?

Er, it's not as lucrative as you might think. I spend a lot of money with the design company. It's there to keep my employees living, more than what it does for me. There are deals here and there that do well, but somehow God provides. It hasn't always been easy, but I just keep at it.

You've had your bronchial troubles. Are you physically well?

Never been healthier. Being on the road can be treacherous: everybody's catching something somewhere, but I take really good care of myself. I eat well, I train well and recently I've increased my level of discipline in taking care of myself. The return has been really good.

Do you have regrets?

There are moments where if our lives were played on a screen for others to watch, we wouldn't want everyone to see, but I have no regrets. Even when we're doing things that may not be what we'd like to think our character is, it's part of ourselves. I've always been myself. I've learnt what I want and don't want, what I like and don't like. I live with that: you can either be in denial or embrace it and keep moving.

What's been your contribution?

I've used my gifts to amplify love. That's what I'm here for. That's what we're all here for. I just happen to use the medium of music. I feel good about that.

How would you like to be remembered?

Wow, that's deep. As a person who was true to themselves, who believed in love and God and creativity and humanity.

KRAV HITZ

Let Len Rule, in three albums. By **John Aizlewood**.

HELLO, IT'S ME

Lenny Kravitz
Let Love Rule
★★★★
(VIRGIN, 1989)

The influences were obvious – *Around The World In A Day*-era Prince, Sly Stone, Spirit, Hendrix – but an album on which Kravitz produced and played almost everything introduced a precocious talent. For all that precocity, *Let Love Rule*'s power lay in Kravitz's songwriting, as he veered from the pyrotechnics of the title track, the themes of which Kravitz is still exploring, to the pop-psychedelia of the lavishly arranged I Build This Garden For Us.

HIS WAY

Lenny Kravitz
Are You Gonna Go My Way
★★★★
(VIRGIN, 1993)

His first UK Number 1 album was dominated by the riff that propels the title track, but elsewhere on this collection of earworms, Come On And Love Me was all percussive clatter and Curtis Mayfield vocals, while the reggae-tinged Eleutheria ("my life is perfect") skankingly evoked his beloved Bahamas, and the turbo-charged Is There Any Love In Your Heart was a rare moment of bitterness ("you're fucking all my friends").

WHAT'S GOING ON?

Lenny Kravitz
It Is Time For A Love Revolution
★★★★
(VIRGIN, 2008)

His leanest and his most unashamedly thrilling collection remains his highest charting in the US. Buzzsaw riffs crashed into each other on Bring It On; Will You Marry Me – more demand than question – evoked a more scuzzy Stevie Wonder, but A Long And Sad Goodbye was an unyielding coming-to-terms with his father: "What did you gain to leave the love you had for a two-bit dame?"

THEIR SATANIC

HOW DID THE SCARIEST, MOST DEMONIC BAND IN ROCK'N'ROLL HISTORY COME SO CLOSE TO MAINSTREAM SUCCESS? AND WHY DID IT ULTIMATELY ELUDE THEM? SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE UNCOMPROMISING ATTITUDE, GUT-WRENCHING LIVE SHOWS AND DELIBERATELY DISTURBING RECORDS? "WE WERE HURT PEOPLE PUNISHING OUR AUDIENCES WITH THE WORST MUSIC EVER." THE SURVIVING **BUTTHOLE SURFERS** CONFESS TO **ANDREW PERRY**. PORTRAIT BY **ANDREW CATLIN**.

LSD WAS VERY MUCH BACK IN VOGUE IN THE UK, when the Butthole Surfers rolled into London on February 26, 1988 for a now-legendary gig at the University of London Union. As house music gripped the nation to a battle cry of 'acieeed', many in the audience, also including a hardened biker contingent, were already orbiting on microdots when these wild-eyed messiahs of Texan post-hardcore hit the stage – a strategy they universally came to regret as the night wore on.

At the front, shirtless in midwinter, the band's daemonically cackling singer Gibby Haynes repeatedly bashed a 'fire cymbal' – a hi-hat filled with blazing alcohol – sending flames up into the lighting rigs, while he mangled his sinister voicings via the dials on an FX gizmo. To the left, guitarist Paul Leary literally went cross-eyed as he summoned the gut-churningly retuned riff to Black Sabbath's Sweet Leaf, for which he and frilly-skirted bassist Jeff Pinkus high-kicked in unison. With two drummers hammering away at the back as if heralding some tribal sacrifice, on any level of consciousness it was fearsome stuff.

The previous year, Blast First, the hip London label which had already introduced Stateside noiseniks Sonic Youth and Big Black to British audiences, had licensed the Buttholes' third long-player *Locust Abortion Technician*, scoring rave music press reviews and, amazingly, airplay from BBC Radio 1's John Peel. Its sacrilegious first track Sweat Loaf opened with a sickeningly twee father-son dialogue: "Daddy… what does regret mean?" asked the youngster, eventually prompting the paternal request, "If you see your mom this weekend, be sure and tell her, SATAN-SATAN-SATAN!"

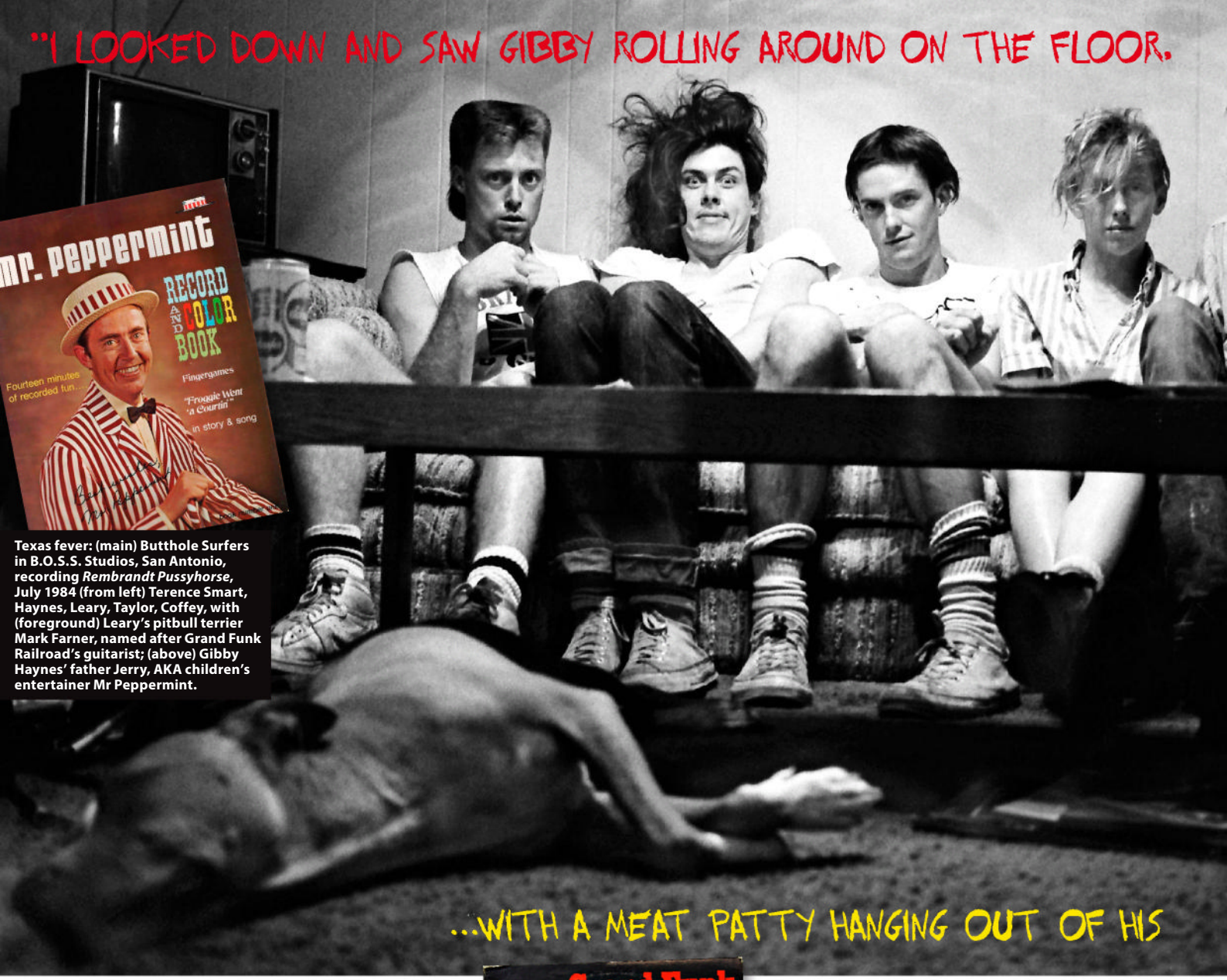
At ULU, the band's queasy fixations got a whole lot harder to stomach, when the screen behind them showed an agonisingly slow-paced movie centred on a naked man's midriff. At a glacial pace, a pair of gloved hands set to work, making incisions around the genitals and apparently preparing to remove them altogether. After a few minutes of this, your writer joined a stampede for the exit, alongside the Reid brothers from The Jesus & Mary Chain, looking even peakier than usual. ➢

Andrew Catlin, Pat Blashill (5)

MAJESTIES REGRETS

Infernal affairs: Butthole Surfers flame on, February 1988, (clockwise from bottom left) Jeff Pinkus. King Coffey, Teresa Taylor, Paul Leary, Gibby Haynes; (opposite) on-stage health and safety Buttholes-style circa 1986.

"I LOOKED DOWN AND SAW GIBBY ROLLING AROUND ON THE FLOOR...WITH A MEAT PATTY HANGING OUT OF HIS



Texas fever: (main) Butthole Surfers in B.O.S.S. Studios, San Antonio, recording *Rembrandt Pussyhorse*, July 1984 (from left) Terence Smart, Haynes, Leary, Taylor, Coffey, with (foreground) Leary's pitbull terrier Mark Farner, named after Grand Funk Railroad's guitarist; (above) Gibby Haynes' father Jerry, AKA children's entertainer Mr Peppermint.

Pat Blashill

And yet, within five years, the Butthole Surfers were poised to be rewarded as revered pioneers of the new alternative rock, with a back catalogue, remastered and reissued on Matador from next month, as admired as it is unique. So how, exactly, did that happen? And where, then, did it all go wrong?

Over Zoom, Paul Leary eyes MOJO ruefully: "The music industry humbled us eventually."

GROWING UP IN DALLAS, TEXAS, Gibson Jerome Haynes was being groomed for a career in accountancy. In high school, he was sporty, a football quarterback, and at six feet six a hoop-shooting ace in basketball. Needless to say, though, there was an attitude problem.

While completing college at San Antonio's Trinity University, he was also clocking on as an auditor with global accountancy conglomerate Peat Marwick (later KPMG), on a $25k salary to help pay his tuition fees, but he soon got his marching orders when he accidentally left on a copier some gross medical photographs he was duplicating for the Strange V.D. magazine he was collating with classmate Paul Leary.

"There's really no such thing as a high-earning accountant, otherwise I might've stuck in there," the 66-year-old Haynes laughs today, down the line from his home in Red Hook, New York. "If I really had been as smart as you seem to think I was, I would've gone to graduate school and rode the college world forever."

His father, Jerry Haynes, was a regional TV personality, hosting sports and cooking programmes, and playing kids' character Mr Peppermint, all of which doubtless imbued young Gibson with a belief that the entertainment industry might be both accessible and lucrative.

Paul Leary Walthall had a more mundane upbringing, but circa 1978-79 identified the towering Haynes as a kindred spirit, as he swaggered around campus with his leather jacket and spiky hair, and the two connected to smoke pot and listen to punk records in their dorm rooms. At Trinity, a liberal arts college, Gibby was already staging puerile musical performances. Leary says he initially rebuffed Haynes' efforts to recruit him, even though he could play the entirety of Grand Funk Railroad's double *Live Album* from 1970 note for note. It was hearing Out In The Gardener, a track from 1981's In A Car EP by Arizona country punks Meat Puppets on SST, that unlocked the door.

"It sounded like a train wreck," Leary tells MOJO from his home studio in Austin, Texas. "There were lots of drums, but there was no distinguishable beat, and the guitars and vocals were the same. It was like, 'Hell, *we* could do that!'"

High priest of harmful matter: Jello Biafra, early Buttholes patron.

Getty

They worked out some covers and self-compositions, and debuted at a gallery opening in San Antonio for Haynes' own visual art.

"The band was pretty much a backdrop for Gibby pulling out stuffed dummies, and tearing things out of them, like toasters, and Big Macs," says Leary. "At one point I looked down and saw Gibby rolling around on the floor, with a meat patty hanging out of his mouth."

"The dummies were stuffed with newspaper," adds Haynes, "and the gallery was four feet deep in crushed-up newspaper, the windows were open, and this springtime wind was blowing, sending tornadoes of it everywhere. It was fucking gorgeous!"

SUITABLY EMBOLDENED, HAYNES AND LEARY persisted, backed by a succession of fleeting bassists and drummers under a series of three-word appellations which effortlessly dripped from Haynes' brain – Dick Gas Five, Ashtray Baby Heads, Abe Lincoln's Bush – until a friend introduced them on-stage referencing their song title, Butthole Surfer. A demo tape was recorded, a copy falling into the hands of one Jeffrey Coffey, a teenage hardcore fan from Fort Worth, Texas.

"Like, the state is run by Republican Baptist assholes," explains 'King' Coffey today from his home, 10 minutes from Leary's in Austin. "But the Buttholes were so different. Paul was all about '70s classic-rock riffs, but he had to destroy the ridiculousness of arena rock, and hardcore too, because that had become silly, dumb and macho."

A few months passed, in which the Buttholes skipped town for California in a bassist's Chevy Nova. After penniless weeks in Los Angeles begging for stage time, they drove to San Francisco, the Chevy barely making it over the Bay Bridge, and eventually sputtering to a halt in an industrial district. Without a clue to their whereabouts, they noticed a band loading into a venue which turned out to be punk redoubt Valencia Tool & Die. They pleaded to be allowed to play three songs – "practically crying," laughs Leary – and their tears weren't wasted, as that evening Jello Biafra from Dead Kennedys witnessed their malnourished chaos and signed them to his Alternative Tentacles label on the spot.

Biafra, the self-styled High Priest Of Harmful Matter, was "immediately infatuated with us," says Haynes, but less happily, on their return to Texas, their rhythm section quit. Haynes and Leary found a rented house outside Austin, and set about self-recording a debut EP, variously titled *Brown Reason To Live*, and *Pee Pee The Sailor*, with anyone who'd participate. During that slow process, Coffey attended a show by his new heroes in Austin. The experience proved life-changing.

"Gibby was stripped to his boxers, with clothes pins in his hair, drawing all over his body with marker pen," he recalls. "And he was playing a saxophone really badly – I mean, who played sax at a hardcore show? Just the audacity of it…"

Afterwards, Coffey bounded backstage and was promptly enlisted, bringing his friend Teresa 'Nervosa' Taylor with him. They'd served in a marching band together, and duly pummelled away, both on their feet, inspired by Killing Joke's ritualistic wallop.

Now able to complete their EP, its Biafra association helped the band gain traction nationally. Through the mid-'80s they toured relentlessly in a series of inadequate vehicles, one with a trench carved out of the cabin so two or three of them could sleep "coffin style", together with Leary's pitbull, Mark Farner.

"Everywhere we went," says Coffey, "the fact that Texans have a reputation as inbred and drooling freed us up to be as stupid as we wanted."

Adds Leary: "We were hurt, fucked-up people punishing our audiences with what we thought was the worst music ever. We'd get all the beer we could drink and gas money, and move on to the next town. We relished being idiots." He pauses, and adds deadly seriously, "I never dreamt I'd one day turn into a normal human being. I thought we were committing suicide."

BUTTHOLE SURFERS' INFAMY as post-hardcore's wildest arrivistes was secure. But not everything was to be taken at face value. Unlike their Texan forefathers, The 13th Floor Elevators, they didn't all drop acid before every show.

"Were we taking a fuck-ton of acid on-stage?" ponders Haynes. "I would admit to having actually taken the drug, but no, that wasn't the reality. Maybe the Grateful Dead did that stuff, but I can't imagine any drug, even weed, as a creative tool."

According to Leary, the band subsisted on alcohol and marijuana, a forbidding and insular gang of weirdos pinballing from city to city, with Haynes as their linchpin, if nothing else because his accounting background saw him entrusted with the band's day-to-day finances. The obvious flaws in this arrangement were exposed – but still not rectified subsequently – after a fracas in October '85 at Pandora's Music Box festival in Rotterdam which made front-page headlines in Holland.

"Gibby got smashed on whisky, and started heaving chairs at the audience," Leary testifies. "By the end, he was naked, fighting eight large Dutch bouncers who obviously hated us. Everybody left to go back to the hotel, and I was the only person responsible enough to rescue our equipment, so I'm carrying bits and pieces, stopping in a park to hide stuff behind a bush then get a second load, and I left all the gear stashed there overnight. The next morning I went to retrieve it, and there was Gibby's overcoat. I reached inside the pocket and it had $10,000 cash sitting in there." ➢

"THEY WERE TRUE PIRATES"

THE FLAMING LIPS' WAYNE COYNE ON THE BUCCANEERING BALLS OF THE BUTTHOLE SURFERS.

"WHEN WE PUT out our first record in 1984, Butthole Surfers' drummer King Coffey worked in a record store, I think, and he was one of our first big fans. So, in November 1986 they were doing shows in Dallas and Austin, and they asked us to open for them. We still didn't know much about them, but then they played, and it was, 'Oh my God, this is like our freaky older brothers here!'

"I mean, we were weirdos on Level 3, and they were on, like, Level 100. They were living it. We didn't live like freaks like they did. We would tour and stay in people's houses, and we'd be nice. We didn't carry guns, take acid, and get in fights. We didn't want that, but we were glad they did!

"They were true pirates, and we idolised them. One night, they're going on-stage, and they need all the house lights out so they can screen their films. There's this one particular light, and no one's turning it off. These aren't like the light bulbs now – these are red-hot bulbs that'll burn the fuck out of your hand, but Gibby just goes over, unscrews it, tucks it in his pocket, and walks on-stage. He wasn't waiting for permission. He was doing it, taking control.

"The album that really blew us away was *Locust Abortion Technician*. I still think it's a disturbing, futuristic, fucked-up record. They were using samplers before anyone really knew what they were. That's why you felt like they were going to take over the world. They were aliens from outer space who knew something the rest of us didn't.

"We used to bash a fire cymbal full of alcohol, but not nearly as fearlessly as Gibby. In fact, a friend of ours would come on-stage and do it. We did it the night the A&R person from Warners flew out to Oklahoma City to see if she wanted to sign us, and the whole place almost caught on fire. Then we decided, 'Gosh, we can't do that again, we're lucky we didn't die!' But we did it those few times basically because they did it.

"Then I think as we went, we liked making more melodic and emotional music, and doing this extravagant show that goes with it, so that time we were around them really changed our lives. Without it we wouldn't be the band that we are now. For us, it was a game-changer, it made us change the way we presented ourselves, think about the structure of music differently, and how you could be a personality, none of which I think we would have stumbled upon otherwise."

As told to Andrew Perry

"WE WERE WEIRDOS ON LEVEL 3. AND THEY WERE ON. LIKE. LEVEL 100. THEY WERE LIVING IT."

Switched-on: BS kindred spirits The Flaming Lips, 1989 (from left) Nathan Roberts, Wayne Coyne, Michael Ivins.

As the Butthole Surfers' notoriety increased, their fortunes improved and they ploughed most of their profits into their stage show, attracting plenty of attention from the authorities.

"Sometimes," says Leary, "the alcohol from the fire cymbal would spill, so the whole floor was on fire. Then Gibby'd bring out a 12-gauge shotgun, and blast that off. We had strobes so bright, you could see the bones in your hand. It got to the point where the fire department would be there every night. They'd want to look at the shotgun, but then hand it right back to us. Nobody ever stopped us doing anything. Occasionally they'd have bouncers with fire extinguishers side of stage, ready to put fires out, but as soon as they'd creep over, Gibby would douse them with alcohol and hold a lighter up to them, and they'd back off real quick."

After washing up in San Francisco again and outstaying their welcome, they decided to settle somewhere new, threw a dart at a map and hit upon Athens, Georgia, home to alt-rock's biggest crossover act, R.E.M. On arrival, the gentrifying college town proved too expensive, so they wound up in nearby Winterville.

"There, we bought an old work van from the Winterville Mobile Home Repair Service," says Haynes, "but people would stop us all over the country, asking if we could fix their toilets."

Consequently, says Leary, they "spray-painted over it, so it said, 'Michael Stipe, despite the hype, I still want to suck on your big long pipe.' Stipe actually lived a block from our pot dealer, so we always enjoyed driving past, but we were too rude ever to speak to him."

BY NOW, THE BUTTHOLES HAD RELEASED TWO LPs with fledgling Chicago indie Touch & Go. 1984's *Psychic... Powerless... Another Man's Sac* and '86's *Rembrandt Pussyhorse* carried some wonderfully cracked music, but didn't quite capture their terrifying on-stage powers. At home in Winterville, Leary, who'd effectively become their in-house producer, set about creating their masterpiece.

For *Locust Abortion Technician*'s disturbing finale, 22 Going On 23, he says, "It was one of those nights where I probably took a little acid, and the rest of the band all went to sleep. I turned on my little transistor radio, and the first thing that came out was this talk show. I started freaking out, put a microphone on and just hit 'record'. This woman was going on about her psychological problems, but the point was, she wasn't a real caller – she was an 80-year-old woman claiming to be younger who often called into these late-night programmes. Once she was done, I put down a bass-guitar track, added some nasty drums and guitar, and there it was."

This and Sweat Loaf bedrocked the show that established the band overseas, but amid all their performative anarchy, the movies they screened were also often not quite what they seemed.

"We'd usually have two 15-millimetre projectors running at the same time, showing different things, like Charlie's Angels next to penis reconstruction," says the guitarist, "but at the end we'd not bother to rewind the films, so one night the penis reconstruction would go forward, the next it would run backwards, like the guy was having his dick removed. We had meat processing films, where, when you ran it backwards, it would start with pork chops and end up with a whole pig."

Despite a fearsome reputation – in no way softened by their formidable female contingent: nude dancer Kathleen Lynch and drummer Teresa Taylor (who left the band after suffering an aneurysm in 1989) – the Buttholes were much loved by other bands on the alternative scene. Kurt Cobain worshipped them: it was a career highlight for him when Nirvana supported Butthole Surfers at Seattle's Union Station in October '88, and it was at a Buttholes show at the LA Palladium in May '91, during the *Nevermind* recording sessions, that he first properly talked to Courtney Love, the future couple briefly mock-wrestling on the floor.

Blast First supremo Paul Smith describes Haynes as "one of the most generous-spirited souls", but adds that the band "never made any secret of their ambitions for advancement." Yet the strategy fell short of modifying their music or behaviour. In Smith's words, Rough Trade US "paid a king's ransom" for 1991's *Piouhgd*, which spawned a minor hit with a wobbly, unsettling cover of Donovan's The Hurdy Gurdy Man, but whose title was unworkable, tellingly 'created' by throwing a dirty sock at a computer keyboard. Yet, they eventually wound up with a deal at mighty Capitol Records.

Haynes audibly tenses up as we arrive at this chapter in their story. "We got signed probably five years too late," he sighs, yes, regretfully. "Those were not really good times."

ON OCTOBER 30, 1993, GIBBY HAYNES WAS ON-STAGE with his short-lived side-project P, whose guitarist was hot new Hollywood movie idol Johnny Depp, at Depp's club on Sunset Strip, The Viper Room. Haynes says they'd met at a cast party for What's Eating Gilbert Grape?, shot in Austin the previous winter, with Depp raving about a pummelling tune Gibby had voiced for Chicago industrialists Ministry called Jesus Built My Hotrod. "We had fun," he says, "going out to dinner, raising hell."

© Jay Blakesberg/Retro Photo Archive, Bob Berg/Getty Images, Marc Broussely/Getty

P's public unveiling, however, was soon overshadowed when the pair's mutual friend, River Phoenix, OD'd outside the club and tragically passed away.

Haynes himself had by that time progressed to harder drugs, readily signposted by his skull-and-crossbones tattoo, where the bones were substituted for a syringe and a crack pipe. That winter, he went through an inconclusive rehab in California also coincidentally attended by Cobain, who jumped the wall mid-term.

Either side of New Year '93-94, Butthole Surfers supported on what proved to be Nirvana's final run of US dates on the West Coast, the Texans promoting a big-budget Capitol debut, *Independent Worm Saloon*. Haynes smirkingly notes that its producer, Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones, "didn't have a high regard for rock singers," and Leary argued with Capitol over its marketing. "I said, If you call us the godfathers of grunge, I quit. They backed down," he notes with grim satisfaction. "We were never into having a plan. We were more about throwing the dirty sock at the keyboard."

Amid spiralling habits and tour fatigue, the real problems started when 1996's *Electric Larryland* yielded the hit that Capitol craved: Pepper, a trip-hoppy meditation on high school, went to Number 31 Stateside.

"It was, be careful what you wish for," reflects Coffey, "because all of a sudden we went from being this cool punk band that it was nice for Capitol to have on the label, to suddenly getting this pressure to deliver another hit. It was hell."

By 1998, *The Last Astronaut* was completed, but Capitol, after issuing promo CDs, refused to put it out, then kept the band locked in contract for three release-less years. "They ground us into the dirt," says Leary, "and we probably deserved it."

Eventually the album was sold on to Hollywood Records, who released it in an unpalatably remixed form as *Weird Revolution*. "That was in September 2001," laughs Coffey, "which happened to be three days before 9/11. The record had exploding planes on it, and the single had an Arabic chorus. Oh yeah!"

And so Butthole Surfers ceased operations, defeated, only reconvening sporadically for live engagements, such as 2008's surreal School Of Rock shows, one at London's Forum, where a rolling cast of mid-teens deputised on guitar, bass and drums on X-certificate classics like I Saw An X-Ray Of A Girl Passing Gas. "Believe me," roars Leary, "there were some chaperones on that tour!"

> "WE BOUGHT AN OLD WORK VAN FROM THE WINTERVILLE MOBILE HOME REPAIR SERVICE. BUT PEOPLE WOULD STOP US, ASKING IF WE COULD FIX THEIR TOILETS."
> PAUL LEARY

FOR HIS PART, LEARY HAD LONG since started "looking for an off-ramp." This proved to be production work, which started with Texan bluegrass punks Bad Livers, and scaled as high as an in-person session with U2, and a five-million-selling album with ska-punks Sublime.

Haynes meanwhile became a star broadcaster, like his dad, via a show on Austin's KROX 101-X, before marrying a successful lawyer and relocating to New York, where his 13-year-old son is an emerging sports pro. "Gibby's a soccer mom!" hoots Leary.

Whether it's embarrassment at his past misadventures, or PTSD when revisiting those times, the mood often turns dark down the line from Red Hook. A sense, perhaps, that Butthole Surfers ultimately failed in their mission.

"Why did we stop?" Gibby wonders, then after a lengthy silence answers, "Probably me."

You mean, your troubles…?

"What," he fires back, "like Ireland?"

After another long pause, he continues. "I've got this theory that every band gets three good records and that's it. I think you could objectively or subjectively look at our collection and see a downward trend in quality. Why that happened, I can't say, but it didn't just happen all of a sudden."

Though Leary was involved in their remastering, Haynes was reluctant at first to listen to Matador's upcoming reissues. "It was like reliving the worst of my life," he says, "where I had no money in my pocket, and no place to sleep. But after a while, I was like, Maybe it wasn't so bad."

Though none of the core trio intend to hop in a clapped-out van ever again, King Coffey hopes for the odd one-off show, while Haynes speculates on them recording "a carefully curated six minutes" of new music.

"Most of us are still alive, and we're still friends," says Leary, gamely. "In the long run, maybe we won the war."

Psychic… Powerless… Another Man's Sac, Rembrandt Pussyhorse and PCPPEP EP are reissued by Matador on March 22. Locust Abortion Technician, Hairway To Steven and Cream Corn From The Socket Of Davis follow later in 2024.

The worms that turned: (left) Butthole Surfers during their major label "hell" (from left) Leary, Coffey, Haynes, New York, 1996; (right) Leary and Haynes on-stage at the Kentish Town Forum, London, during the School Of Rock All-Stars show, July 26, 2008.

NOW I'VE GOT A WITNESS*

GERED MANKOWITZ's iconic photographs defined THE ROLLING STONES in their revolutionary 1965-67 phase. Lost, reclaimed, unpublished and rarely seen, here's a selection from his dazzling new book.

THE BOY WONDER OF SWINGING LONDON snappers, Gered Mankowitz had already shot striking portraits of Marianne Faithfull when he was called into the office of Rolling Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham, to find a young man in dark glasses behind an enormous desk, talking ten to the dozen. "It was almost like jive talk, quite difficult to follow!" laughs Mankowitz today. "But very amusing. Very exciting to be with. You felt that you were with somebody who was quite visionary."

Mankowitz – whose passion for photography had been stoked by shutterbug Peter Sellers, a friend of his father, Expresso Bongo screenwriter Wolf – had already established a style, with shades of his heroes Irving Penn and Richard Avedon. Loog Oldham had a hunch he was right for the Stones. And in fact his first shoot with the band – at his Mason's Yard studio in Mayfair – would provide the timeless chiaroscuro of the *Out Of Our Heads* sleeve art.

It was the beginning of a series of adventures with the group, peaking with the band's October-December '65 tour to the States, after which Mankowitz accompanied Keith Richards to an Arizona dude ranch, for a short holiday channelling the Wild West.

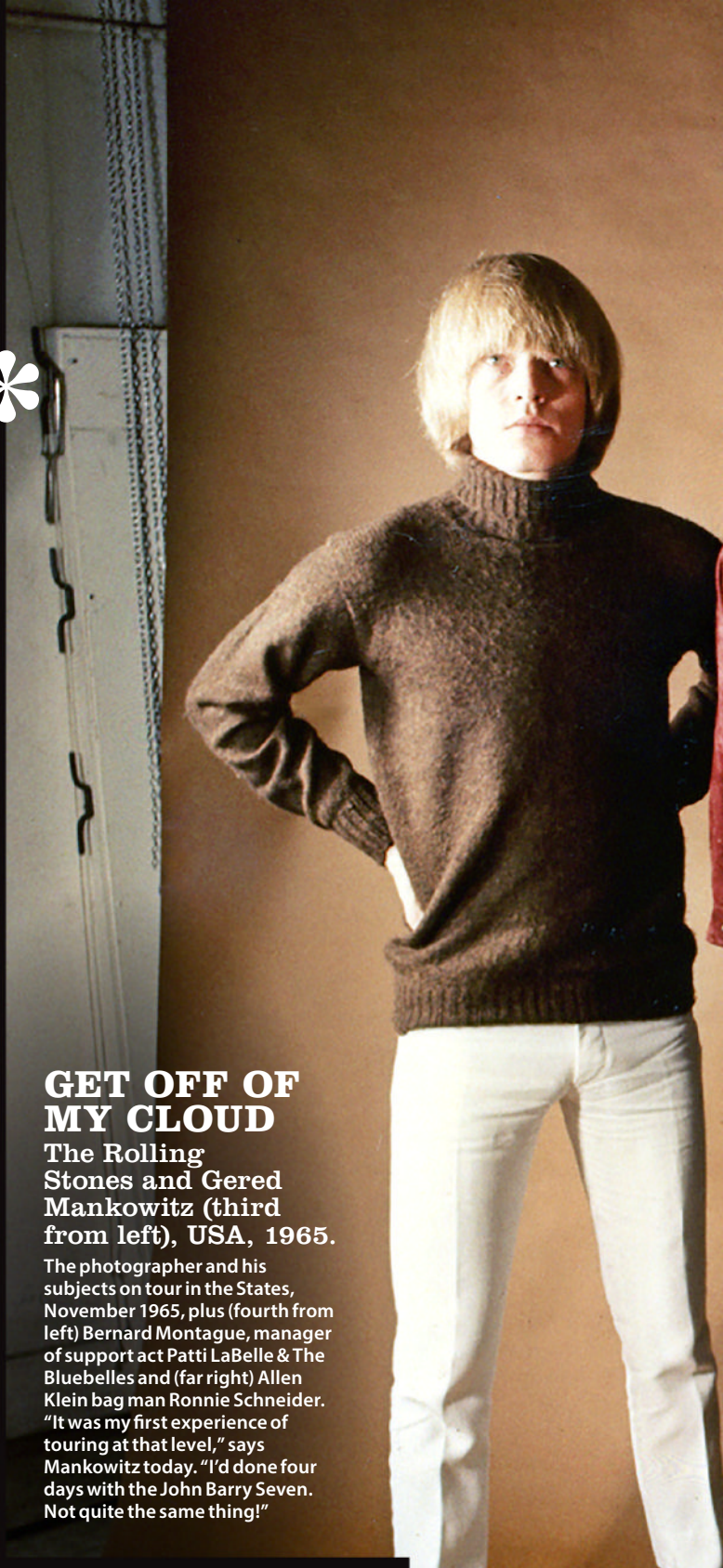
"We left with Colt 45s and a Winchester repeating rifle," says Mankowitz, shaking his head at the memory. "I remember the stewardess on the flight from Phoenix to LA asking very sweetly for our guns. They all went in this cupboard, with the coats and briefcases."

For all his juice with the band, however, his connection with Loog Oldham made him vulnerable when the Stones and their manager began growing apart. Suddenly, Mankowitz was noting the increasing presence of ex-Vogue snapper Michael Cooper, whom the Stones would commission to shoot the cover for *Their Satanic Majesties Request*.

And yet Mankowitz's pictures have long outlived his day-to-day involvement with the Stones, helping define their moody, uncompromising image and, as he rightly notes, "lay down a sort of blueprint for a lot of music photography to come."

Over the following six pages, the evidence speaks for itself. ➢

Gered Mankowitz (2)



GET OFF OF MY CLOUD

The Rolling Stones and Gered Mankowitz (third from left), USA, 1965.

The photographer and his subjects on tour in the States, November 1965, plus (fourth from left) Bernard Montague, manager of support act Patti LaBelle & The Bluebelles and (far right) Allen Klein bag man Ronnie Schneider. "It was my first experience of touring at that level," says Mankowitz today. "I'd done four days with the John Barry Seven. Not quite the same thing!"

100 YEARS AGO

The Rolling Stones, Mason's Yard, Mayfair, 1965.

From Mankowitz's first shoot with the Stones, here's a frame he recently recovered from an old picture library, having thought there was only one survivor from the set-up. "I really like the blur on Mick's face," says Mankowitz, "and the funny look Charlie's giving him. You can see why it wasn't used at the time. Now I feel it fills a gap and tells a story."

ANYBODY SEEN MY BABY?

The Stones and family members, London, October 1965.

Collage of unpublished shots taken at TWA's VIP lounge before the band and snapper flew to America. "There's another frame out there – with Charlie looking morose. But we wouldn't have printed a picture of Bill's wife [Diane] and son [Stephen] – it just wasn't a done thing at the time to promote wives and girlfriends. I did the collage especially for the book."

OUT OF CONTROL

Brian Jones, Olympic Studios, Barnes, London, 1967.

"This is the last photograph I took of Brian," writes Mankowitz in Rare And Unseen. "It's a poignant picture for me, taken during what, looking back, was a pretty awful time. Brian looks exhausted, haggard even. He was frequently not up to much, at one moment recording an important contribution to a song and then in the next collapsing into his food and needing help."

IN ANOTHER LAND

Charlie Watts, RCA Studios, Los Angeles, December 1965.

"It was an exhausting period," says Mankowitz. "The Stones were playing US shows then going straight into the studio to record the songs for *Aftermath*. But by this time they were very comfortable with me. And I knew when to get close and when to keep back. Being in the studio was fascinating, though. There's a lot of boring stuff, then suddenly it *gels*. It's like magic."

Gered Mankowitz (6)

STRAY CAT BLUES

Mick Jagger, Harley House, Marylebone, London, 1966.

"The money was beginning to flow in," recalls Mankowitz, "and they were getting the expensive homes and cars and lifestyle. Their office got me to shoot them all at home, because there was such a demand for those kinds of pictures. Mick was just moving into Harley House. I think the cat was Chrissy Shrimpton's, his girlfriend at the time."

ONE MORE SHOT

Keith Richards, passport photo, unused, 1965.

"Andrew sprung it on me at the end of that first shoot – 'Can you take some passport photos?' It threw me into a complete panic – I thought I'd finished, and I wasn't sure of the, um, regulatory requirements. But looking back at them, I caught something of the youth and the naivety of the guys at that moment in time. But I was embarrassed about them for years!"

Credit in here

PLAY WITH FIRE

Backstage contretemps, USA, November 1965.

Alarmed by the screaming girls, the authorities did not know how to handle Stones shows, stopping them often within the first 15 minutes. Mankowitz captures Jones and Richards arguing to be allowed back on. "Everyone would settle down," says Mankowitz. "Then the curtain would go back up and Mick would come to the front, shake his bum and say, 'Get off your seat!'"

TORN AND FRAYED

The Stones on Primrose Hill, 1966.

Mankowitz first developed this blurring/vignette technique for shooting in recording studios, to de-emphasise distracting backgrounds. For the cover shoot for *Between The Buttons*, shot at the end of a recording session as dawn was breaking, the effect dissolved the trees and even the band. "Everything merged into everything else in this slightly trippy way."

I JUST WANT TO SEE HIS FACE

Mick Jagger, RCA Studios, Los Angeles, December 1965.

Jagger in pensive mood, recording for *Aftermath*. The microphone was allegedly Elvis Presley's. "Often the best pictures were at moments of reflection," writes Mankowitz in Rare And Unseen, "when the band were working something through or listening back to a track. There was a stillness and sense of contemplation that I found captivating."

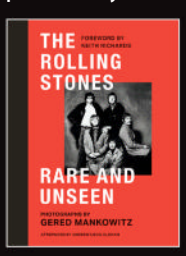
YOU CAN'T CATCH ME

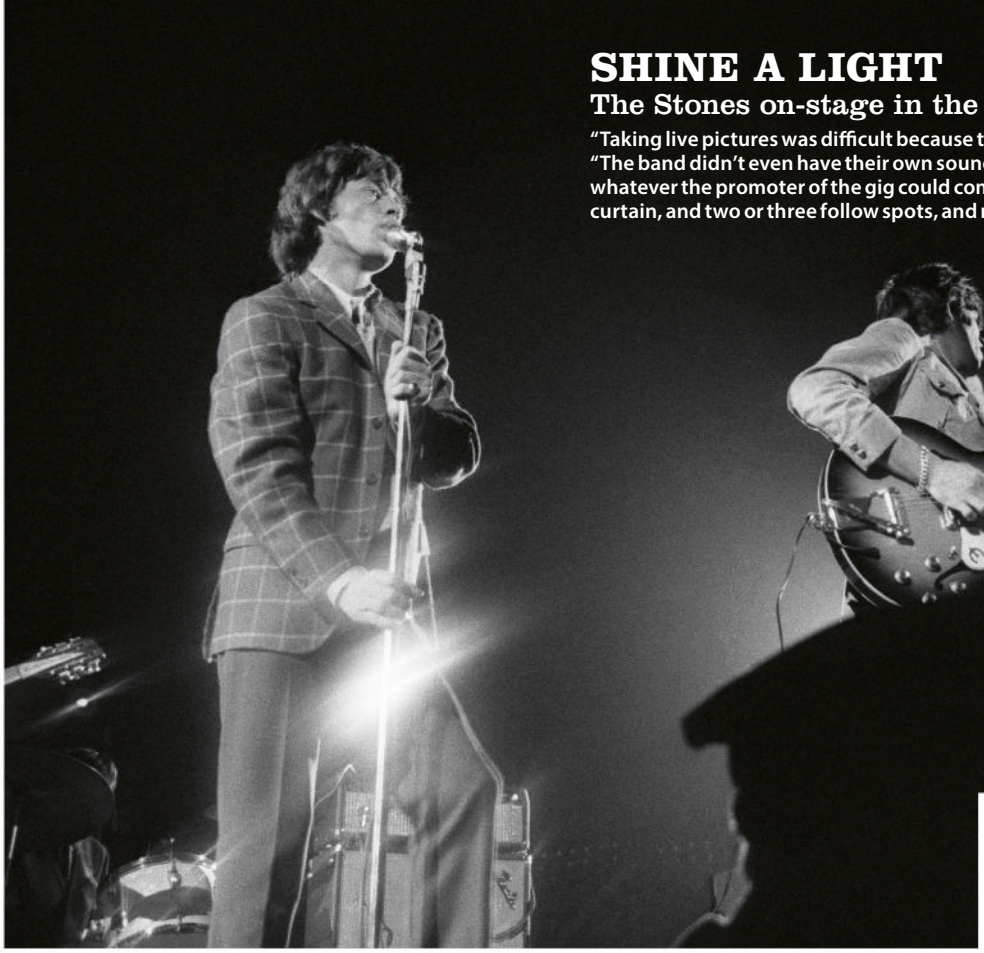
The Stones, Mason's Yard, Mayfair, 1965.

On his first day with the band, a shot that shows the context of the better-known "caged Stones" crop. To the right are stacked the boards between which Mankowitz, on a whim, would place the band for the now-classic *Out Of Our Heads* (UK) and *December's Children* (US) covers. "I like Brian in this: almost like a little boy with his knees tucked in."

ANY WAY YOU LOOK AT IT

The Rolling Stones Rare And Unseen: Photographs By Gered Mankowitz is published by Welbeck on March 28, RRP £35. It features a foreword by Keith Richards, an afterword by Andrew Loog Oldham, plus essays by Will Hodgkinson, Peter York, Ben Sisario, Leah Kardos and Terry Newman.

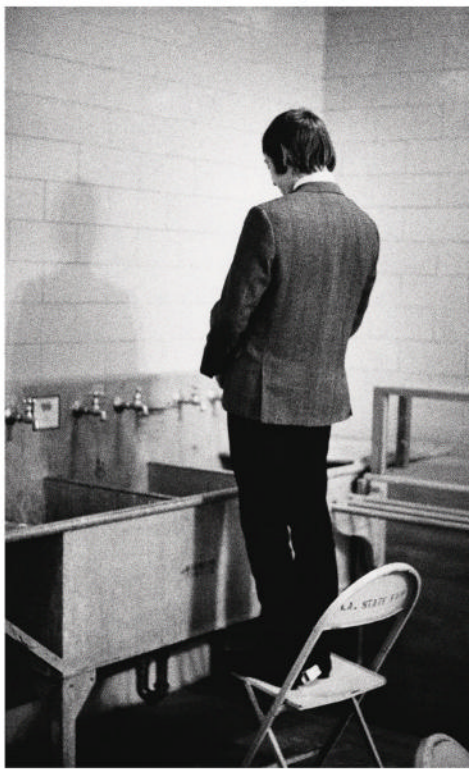




SHINE A LIGHT

The Stones on-stage in the US, November 1965.

"Taking live pictures was difficult because the lighting was so poor," notes Mankowitz. "The band didn't even have their own sound crew, let alone a lighting crew. So they just got whatever the promoter of the gig could come up with, which was usually a background curtain, and two or three follow spots, and maybe some footlights, if it was a theatre."



THE LAST TIME

Keith Richards and Bill Wyman, Olympic Studios, 1967.

Mankowitz has bittersweet memories of his last session with the band, a recording date for *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. "They were breaking up with Andrew – creating a situation where it was intolerable for him," he says. "He couldn't be the producer because they weren't responding. They weren't turning up on time. And they were very stoned."

HATE TO SEE YOU GO

Charlie Watts, LA Memorial Sports Arena, December 1965.

"We piss anywhere, man," Jagger was reported to have said in response to the outrage over the group's al fresco micturition in Forest Gate, March 1965 (which cost Jagger, Jones and Wyman a fiver each, plus costs at West Ham magistrates court). It's hard to imagine the gentlemanly drummer actually relieving himself in a sink, so maybe he's *taking* the piss.

Gered Mankowitz (6)

MOJO PRESENTS

WAXAHATCHEE's soul-baring blend of indie rock and country pop blossoms on *Tigers Blood*. For Katie Crutchfield, it's shelter at the end of a long road strewn with broken bottles, bruised hearts and hand-wringing over her musical identity. "I truly had a few moments where I was like, I'm going to die," she tells GRAYSON HAVER CURRIN.

Photography by MOLLY MATALON

THREE DAYS INTO THE FIRST SESSION FOR THE SIXTH WAXAHATCHEE ALBUM, IN Durham, North Carolina, the producer Brad Cook sent the band home early.

It was a muggy afternoon in late July 2022, the heat and humidity of the Piedmont region closing in like a sauna. Katie Crutchfield had just finished an early-summer tour opening for Sheryl Crow and Jason Isbell, on which she had locked into a fluent songwriting rhythm. After her early set, she would retire to her bus with a keyboard, guitar, and laptop, turning bits of melody she'd stowed for years into full songs. By tour's end, she had four new tunes.

"I didn't see Jason or Sheryl much, because I was tucked away," says Crutchfield. "I got good at finding ways to have privacy." The singer is curled on the couch of the Kansas City home she owns with her longtime boyfriend, the singer-songwriter Kevin Morby. Their puppy, Ernestine, lazes by her waist.

"But I ran into Jason one day, and he's like, 'Ya got any new songs?'" she remembers. "I said, Man, I've got a hot hand. I'm *in* it. It's the best feeling, like you're high on it."

For two days in Cook's backyard studio, Puff City, that momentum continued. Joined by a small crew that included songwriter and Wednesday multi-instrumentalist M. J. Lenderman, Crutchfield and Cook translated rough drafts into full-band numbers with uncanny ease. Lenderman's aching harmonies on the complicated love song Right Back To It made them all tear up. After Lenderman left to open for the Drive-By Truckers, though, the crew slammed into a brick wall of a tune called 365. Crutchfield first began the frank examination of addiction while ➢

Molly Matalon

Waxing lyrical: "I've been saying it since I was 15 – all I want to do is write songs," says Katie Crutchfield, AKA Waxahatchee, Kansas City, 2023.

"KEVIN WAS LIKE, 'YOU'RE A *COUNTRY* STAR, A COUNTRY SINGER. I DON'T THINK YOU SEE THIS IN YOURSELF.'"
Katie Crutchfield

writing for country star and childhood hero Wynonna Judd; sitting at her piano in Kansas City, she quickly realised she wanted the song for herself.

But in Puff City, no one knew quite what to do with 365. Crutchfield and Cook's first full-length collaboration, 2020's *Saint Cloud*, had been a breakthrough, arriving nearly a decade after Waxahatchee's debut. Cook, she says, had "cracked something open in me… saw something in me that I wasn't seeing. We both really wanted people to not think *Saint Cloud* was a fluke."

What's more, Crutchfield wondered if she might try a bona fide pop record after so long in indie rock's trenches. But as they added electronics to 365, twisting the tune about in hopes of shaping something big, they realised it was all wrong.

"So I'm really frustrated," Crutchfield remembers, grimacing. "None of this is working, and I don't know how to contribute. And I hear Brad say, 'All right, guys, I think that's good for today.'"

The pair sat around an unlit firepit, crying more – bad tears this time, as though one track could destroy their entire chemistry. Cook suggested he might not be the producer she needed, that he didn't know how to help her move forward. Crutchfield countered it was *her* fault, that she was pushing too hard toward a horizon she could not articulate.

"We had never tripped over something before. Everything had always come so easy, such a natural flow," Crutchfield says, grinning now. "When there wasn't that, we knew we needed to retrace our steps."

RETRACING STEPS IS A THEME FOR CRUTCHFIELD. Born in Birmingham, a crucible of American history in the fertile strip of northern Alabama, she is the second of three sisters, born two minutes after mirror twin, Allison. As kids, they loved dancing and the country music endemic to the region and time: Shania Twain, Trisha Yearwood, Wynonna.

But the emergence of The Strokes soon fascinated the twins, tracing the band's influences through Guided by Voices to The Velvet Underground. The summer after the pair turned 14, an R.E.M. show at an Alabama amphitheatre offered a sort of Southern spiritual epiphany. Their first band, The Ackleys, followed. "I've been saying it since I was 15: all I want to do is write songs," she says, "the best part of all of it."

Those childhood touchstones, however, fell out of favour. For their sixteenth birthday Danny Gamble, a regular at Crutchfield's grandparents' restaurant in the little college town of Montevallo, Alabama, gifted them bespoke compilations of music by women. Crutchfield recalls scoffing at Lucinda Williams but embracing Fiona Apple and P.J. Harvey. "I remember thinking, *This* is country. *I* am punk rock. I am *indie* rock."

That remained her ethos for at least a decade, from her scuffed but buoyant next band with Allison, P. S. Eliot, to her earliest Waxahatchee efforts, including 2012's blurred *American Weekend* and 2015's tempestuous *Ivy Tripp*. Beneath creak or clatter, though, her arcing melodies and plaintive tone betrayed rural roots. "Whether it was conscious or not, Katie's always had an element of country," Allison tells MOJO today. "That's why it's named Waxahatchee, after the creek where our parents have a place. She was always *trying* to reconnect with our youth."

Finally, in her late twenties and at an ex's insistence, Crutchfield gave Lucinda Williams a chance, and ended up listening to little else for two years. She began covering Williams, especially during a co-headlining solo tour alongside Kevin Morby just before they began dating. The transformation stunned Morby. "He was like, 'You're a *country* star, a country singer. I don't think you see this in yourself,'" Crutchfield remembers, laughing. "I was spinning my wheels. That helped me have perspective."

This fledgling realisation dovetailed with another epiphany: she was slowly drinking herself into oblivion. She made *Ivy Tripp* during an extended bender while living alone on Long Island, New York, her now-ex on tour. On the road herself, she assumed the role of nightly carnival leader, often drinking until she blacked out. She would quit for a month, then throw herself back into drinking. There were other addicts in her family, and the tug felt inescapable. But during a particularly debauched European run in June 2018, including a few too many parties at Primavera, she recognised it would only worsen.

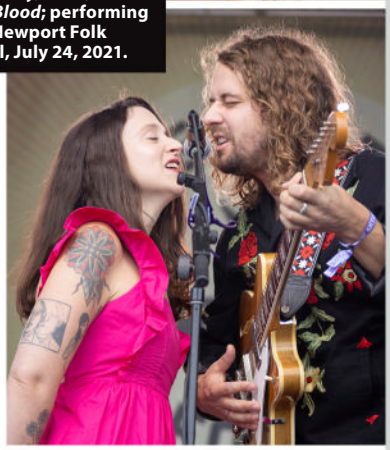
"I truly had a few moments where I was like, I'm going to die," she says with a sigh. "You get to a certain point in your life where it is unsustainable. It took up so much of my brain capacity."

As she neared 30, positive changes began piling up. She moved

Molly Matalon (2), Getty (3), courtesy Katie Crutchfield, Catherine Humphreyville

Plain sailing: (clockwise from left) with Jess Williamson in Plains; Katie (left) and twin sister Allison as P.S. Eliot; Blonde ambition: on-stage at the Ritz, Manchester, 2013; sharing the mike with partner Kevin Morby, 2021.

Crutchfield chronicles: (from far left) "I have a vision" – Katie at home in Kansas City, 2023; new LP *Tigers Blood*; performing at the Newport Folk Festival, July 24, 2021.



WAX TRAX

Katie Crutchfield's path to *Tigers Blood*, by **Grayson Haver Currin**.

WAXAHATCHEE

★★★★

American Weekend

(Don Giovanni, 2012)

Recorded over the course of a bleary weekend in her family's vacation trailer during a historic snowstorm, this is a bracing lo-fi document of heartbreak and addiction. Informed by The Mountain Goats and Guided By Voices, Crutchfield suspends her instinctual melodies and sombre poetics inside tape-distortion haze.

WAXAHATCHEE

★★★★

Out In The Storm

(Merge, 2017)

Crutchfield was still years from leaning into her country (and country-pop) roots, either on-stage or on record. But the fevered grace that would help define her later work is abundant on her fourth album, co-produced by alt-rock royalty John Agnello but powered by her versatile voice and sharp barbs about love and dejection.

WAXAHATCHEE

★★★★

Saint Cloud

(Merge, 2020)

"I'm in a war with myself," Crutchfield sang on this career catapult. "It's got nothing to do with you." Indeed, the years leading to *Saint Cloud* were ones of intense personal overhaul, reflections on which pour out through these 11 poignant and magnetic songs. With producer Brad Cook, she finally unlocked her code.

PLAINS

★★★

I Walked With You A Ways

(Anti-, 2022)

Written and recorded with fellow Southerner and country acolyte Jess Williamson, this 10-song set is a crucial stopover between *Saint Cloud* and *Tigers Blood*. Crutchfield beds into the music of her youth, sending out Hurricane like the low-key offspring of The Chicks and delivering Problem With It like a mid-'90s country conflagration.

in with Morby. She made a 2018 EP with Cook and recognised she'd finally found a steadfast collaborator. She stayed sober. She slowly shrugged off social media, inspired by author Cal Newport's ideas about "deep work". She became, as she brags, "one of the greatest sleepers on Earth."

Crutchfield suffused her early records with a slacker's nonchalance, fuelled by an indie *esprit de corps* and booze. "I just thought, We'll do whatever," she says with a shrug. "And then, with Brad, I thought I should be looking at the essence. Simplify. Take a classic approach."

Just as Crutchfield and Cook finished *Saint Cloud* in late 2019, its sharp reckonings with the past presented with a newfound clarity and a touch of country moan, sister Allison began working at the record label Anti-. She recognised what a tremendous musical step her younger sister was taking – and all the smaller life steps it had taken to do it.

"The drinking was just exhaustion," says Allison. "When she eliminated that, she could peel away these dark, protective layers. She got to know herself."

IN THE DAWNING DAYS OF 2023, AFTER Waxahatchee had signed to Anti-, Crutchfield and Cook returned to Durham for the first time since the day of the 365 impasse. Lenderman was back on guitar with Cook on bass, plus his brother Phil on piano and Spencer Tweedy on drums. The LP – the imminent *Tigers Blood* – was almost entirely written. The band crackled as it worked through the songs, the Venn diagram of Lenderman and Crutchfield's favourite Southern bands – Drive-By Truckers and Sparklehorse, Lucinda Williams and R.E.M. – adding a graceful urgency to Crutchfield's hymns of old torment and cautious hope.

But for their writer, a few songs didn't hit quite hard enough. She wanted to hear them live, before the band recorded them. Cook sent a text and secured a night at a local haunt on January 4, her 34th birthday. "I wanted *Tigers Blood* to be an elevated, more feminine bar band," says Crutchfield. "But I knew I wasn't going to understand the energy until I could hear myself sing it, reacting to the band and audience."

To a capacity crowd they played only new stuff, one last rehearsal for an eager audience unaware that these songs had barely survived their first rehearsals mere miles away.

"Making the record felt like a breeze, because it didn't feel like there was pressure to make this *killer* record any more," says Brad Cook. "We had gone through this crazy vulnerable experience together live. We'd already learned it."

They reconvened two months later at Sonic Ranch, a sprawling pecan farm and studio complex in west Texas that ends where the border wall begins. After a week, they'd nearly cut the entire album, as easy as breathing.

But there was one thing left to do: finally get 365 right. They'd tried it two more times, first with Crutchfield on piano and then another more elaborate construction that collapsed beneath its own weight. Cook heard Crutchfield playing it on guitar alone in the studio and insisted she try it once more – simple now, with Lenderman and Cook on guitars and Crutchfield singing, her voice somehow growing stronger with each new confession. It is now the emotional bulwark of *Tigers Blood*, an album that confronts the living ghosts of Crutchfield's past and turns to face what's next.

"As artists, we sometimes try to have *too* much control," she says, daylight in Kansas City now all but gone. "It's important to have some self-awareness about your actual skill set, what you're bringing to the table. I credit these being my best records to realising, Hey, I write the songs, and I have a vision."

daydream believer

Torch-holder for outré pop in The Pale Fountains, self-sabotaging songsmith supreme in Shack, Scouse enigma michael head spent years in the wilderness, battling smack, booze and music biz indifference. It's what makes his current revival so poignant, joyous and – frankly – unexpected. "You could feed half of Liverpool off Mick's positive energy," discovers ian harrison.

portrait: john johnson

HIS OTHER SUBJECTS HAD included Yves Saint Laurent, Charlie Chaplin and Agatha Christie, but in February 1992 French filmmaker Jérôme de Missolz had a humbler assignment – albeit one with its own strains of style, comedy and intrigue.

Shot for French TV network La Sept, You'll Never Walk Alone was a dingy-yet-romantic overview of Liverpool's music scene. Mersey faces included Ian McCulloch, Pete Wylie and early Beatles manager Allan Williams, but the most compelling screen time belonged to Michael Head.

Then 30, Michael Head fronted early-'80s chart hopefuls The Pale Fountains and then Shack, whose wheels had come off after just one underachieving LP, aptly titled *Zilch*. Filmed by de Missolz in the Head family home in no-nonsense Kensington, at Anfield watching Liverpool beat Bristol Rovers in the Cup, and wandering city hinterlands at night, Head seems adrift. "In a few months' time I could be on the dole when me contract runs out," he informs the camera, adding, "I dunno what the fuck's going on."

Yet the music captured on film is extraordinary. Playing and harmonising in front of a washing machine piled high with domestic detritus, Mick and brother John cast spells, roving in a private realm of magic and ecstasy. It was just as well: as far as the Heads knew, studio versions of these songs would never be heard. Tapes of their second album, *Waterpistol*, had been lost in a fire at the west London office/studio of their Ghetto Recording Company label, which was soon to cease trading.

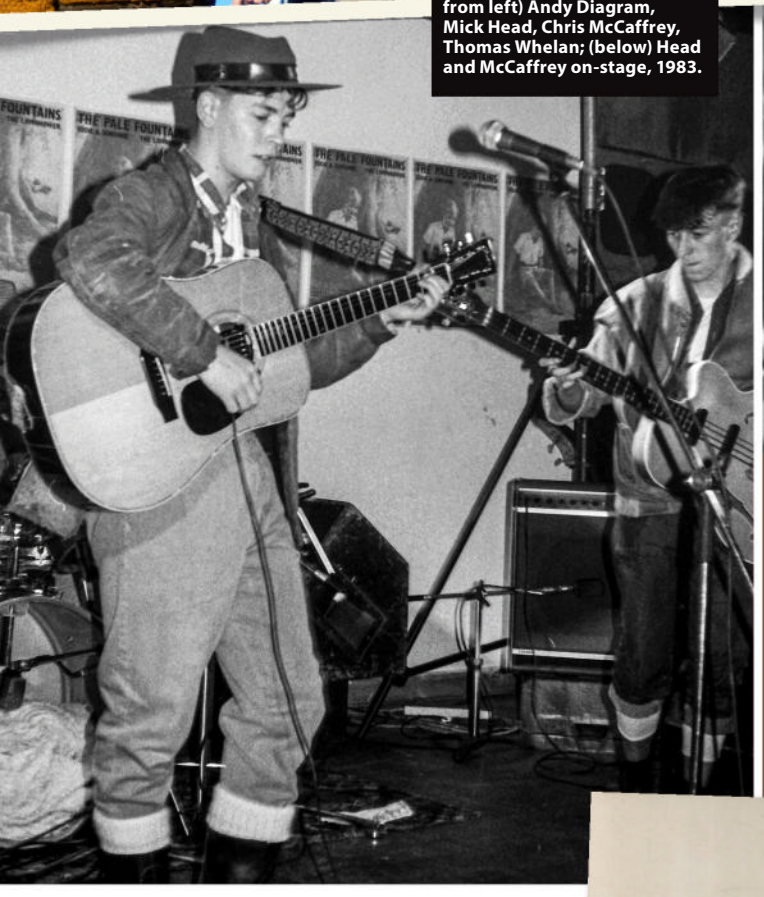
With hope in his heart: out of the shack and stranded no longer, the future-facing Mick Head today.

Cut loose from the music business, it could have been the last sighting of Mick Head, his story over before it had properly begun. No one knew then that those songs, and *Waterpistol* itself, would re-emerge in 1995 after producer Chris Allison retrieved the sole surviving copy on a DAT he left in the glove compartment of a hire car in New Mexico, or that Head would himself make a full return from the dark. Along the way there would be heroin addiction, a battle with the bottle, highs and lows, strife, alienation and more incandescent music. But in 1992?

"I'm into escapism. I'm a drug addict," confides Mick in You'll Never Walk Alone, several pints down at the now-lost Mount Vernon pub. "'Cos I take so many drugs, when I go to bed, at night, I don't dream. With me, it's like, I do all my dreaming in the day…" ➢

John Johnson

Nature boys: (above) The Pale Fountains in 1983 (clockwise from left) Andy Diagram, Mick Head, Chris McCaffrey, Thomas Whelan; (below) Head and McCaffrey on-stage, 1983.



"I was hearing Burt Bacharach, Miles Davis, Sérgio Mendes, and I was just sponging it all in, on a mission to write songs."
Michael Head

MOJO MEETS MICK HEAD A few weeks before Christmas in Liverpool's Lime Street station, at the twin statues of comedian Ken Dodd and campaigning MP Bessie Braddock. Now a trim 62, he's wearing an olive-green Bundeswehr parka, jeans and suede DMs, and carries a weathered satchel. Lightly crinkled, with a ready grin and a sparkle in his eyes, you can still see the young buck who crooned songs of yearning with The Pale Fountains 40 years ago.

Before our interview, we wander the city, remembering vanished landmarks like the old Probe record shop on Button Street, Callans army surplus and others. A plan to take in Kensington is abandoned because of the rain: instead we drop by at the café where his French wife Saida works. Wed just weeks before, they embrace lovingly.

A short walk north is another important locale. It was here, outside a second-hand basement bookshop on Victoria Street, where the teenage Head's destiny changed when he ran into Paul Simpson, Mersey post-punk style arbiter and original organist with The Teardrop Explodes. The previous evening of February 24, 1979, the group had appeared on Granada TV's What's On.

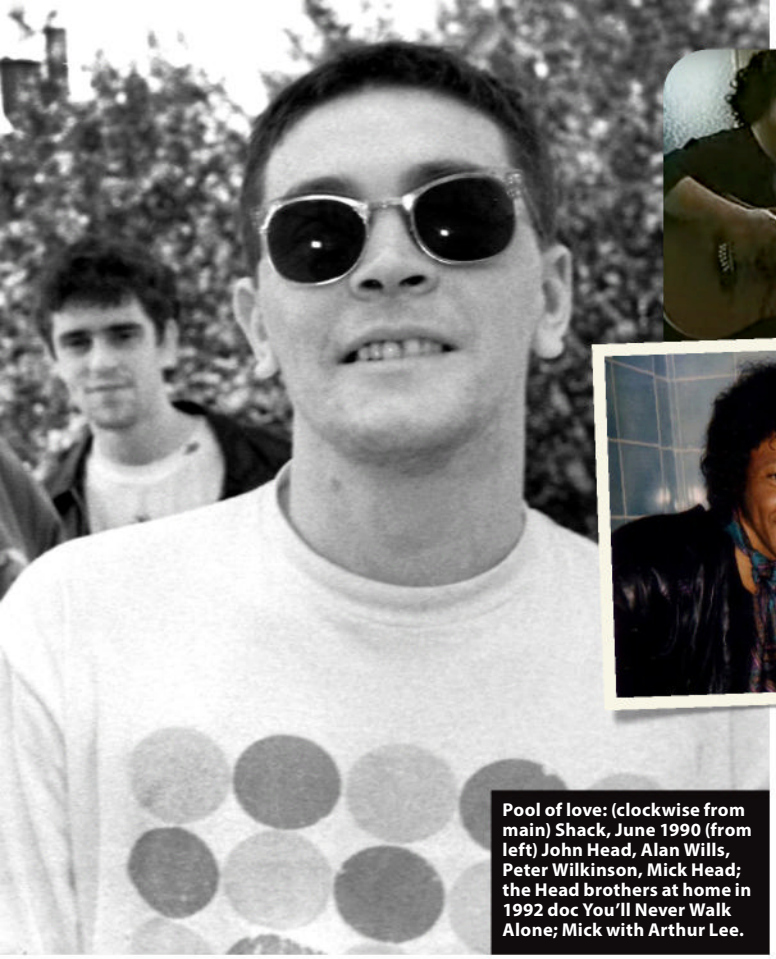
"I was just trying to keep my calm talking to Simmo," remembers Head, who was then a teaboy at Brian Green Business Machines, purveyor of office essentials. "But I was *fucking exploding* in my mind. First he says I should meet Yorkie [AKA David Palmer, whose mother Gladys allowed The Teardrop Explodes and Echo And The Bunnymen to rehearse in her basement] 'cos he was forming a band. Then he goes, 'We're playing the Everyman Bistro tomorrow night, I'll get you on the guestlist if you want.' Too fucking right! I watched them and I knew that this music was the future."

With Palmer, Head formed a group trading variously as Egypt For Now, The Dance Party and Ho Ho Bacteria. Meanwhile, Simpson had picked up a Love best-of on import at Probe, and donated it to his pal, Bunnymen bassist Les Pattinson. Pattinson passed it on to Yorkie, who played it to Head.

"Yorkie had someone to brainwash, and he did," says Head. "My record collection when I was a kid was Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash and me old feller's country & western. Yorkie was putting on The Byrds, Television, and then Love. That blew me away, a game changer."

In 1980, Yorkie departed to form The Balcony. Head moved from keyboards to guitar and soon had a new vehicle, formed with

Getty, Renaud Monfourny, Natalie Gledhill, Graham Smillie



Pool of love: (clockwise from main) Shack, June 1990 (from left) John Head, Alan Wills, Peter Wilkinson, Mick Head; the Head brothers at home in 1992 doc You'll Never Walk Alone; Mick with Arthur Lee.

bassist Chris 'Biffa' McCaffrey and drummer Jock Whelan, seeded by student grant cheques. The voyage of The Pale Fountains, né The Love Fountains, was underway.

Theirs was a bold look, a romantic vision of vintage outdoor adventure. The Paleys, as they were nicknamed, played their first gig supporting Orange Juice at the Plato's Ballroom club night in Liverpool on August 31, 1981. Simpson's new band The Wild Swans were also making their debut.

"They were like a breath of fresh air," Simpson tells MOJO today. "They had a sort of samba, bossa nova, Bacharach kind of sunshine, which was something we hadn't really had in post-punk. Mick was painting with brighter colours than the rest of us."

UNDER SOMETIME PERCUSSIONIST NATHAN McGough's management, The Pale Fountains played their first London gig at the Barracuda Club in Baker Street. Double-booked with a party for the Electric Blue video-smut company, that night the group met Dislocation Dance trumpeter Andy Diagram, who was immediately recruited, and Erika Roe – infamous for 'streaking' at a televised rugby match in 1982 – who was not.

Another crucial development, says Mick, was Aztec Camera's Roddy Frame initiating him into the mysteries of jazz chords. At the same time, Head was tapping an existing enthusiasm for Latin pop and easy listening.

"The sound was changing, daily," he says. "I was hearing Burt Bacharach, Miles Davis, Sérgio Mendes and Astrud Gilberto, classical things and I was just *sponging* it all in, on a mission to write songs."

After a single Just A Girl/(There's Always) Something On My Mind on Les Disques Du Crépuscule's UK arm Operation Twilight, the majors began to get excited. Signing to Virgin for six figures, the Paleys' impassioned orchestral epic Thank You reached Number 48 in the UK singles chart in November 1982. Nearly 18 months elapsed before 1984's grandiose debut album *Pacific Street*. Full-hearted and stylistically varied, it stalled at Number 85. Almost a year to the day later came the Ian Broudie-produced, less eclectic *...From Across The Kitchen Table*, now with John Head on guitar, which did even worse.

"I didn't want to join," says John today, "because I didn't want to spoil the sound. I'd gone to London on the Easter holidays, and was supposed to go back and do my exams but I ended up playing on the record. I wanted them to record the sound they had even more, I didn't want to be the change."

Soon after their second LP's release, The Pale Fountains played an ill-matched support to Killing Joke at the Hammersmith Palais on February 25, 1985. "I remember getting a lot of spit aimed in our direction," says John. It summarised the band's essential plight – they fit the mould neither of an alternative rock band, nor of a chart pop group.

"I was talking to a producer from the BBC at a party when the Paleys signed," recalls Mick, "and he said to me, 'Where's your frontman, your Limahl?'"

The vision of Kajagoogoo's pineapple-haired Smash Hits pin-up fronting The Pale Fountains is momentarily distracting.

"I said, There's no fucking Limahl mate, we're songwriters! That always stuck with me."

Their last singles – even the ravishing and anthemic Jean's Not Happening – failed to chart, and after a tour with the Bunnymen in 1985, the group returned to Liverpool and disintegrated. Tragically, Biffa succumbed to a brain tumour in 1989. "I think about him every day," says Head. "Some people say you've got someone looking over your neck, and if you want to go down that mythical thing, I'd say it's Biffa... and me ma, deffo."

Another benign influence on Mick Head was publisher Dick Leahy. With Wham!'s writer/singer among his clients, Leahy's objective was to make Head "the George Michael of psychedelia". Head's new band, Shack, duly signed to Leahy's new label Ghetto.

It was around this time that Mick discovered marijuana.

"The Paleys were drink, acid, speed, but not weed," he says. "I got a bag of bush and it changed me life. It gave me a little tilt of, like, looking at things differently... I thought to myself, OK, you are in control, but there's also someone inside there called your subconscious, who's gonna give you different points of view."

After the Paleys' songs of innocence came experience. Shack's 1988 debut, *Zilch*, was a tougher prospect, although today its dated thwacking drums detract from the fine harmony pop of social realist singles High Rise Low Life and Emergency. Chart action was also nada, yet Head was arguably moving towards an artistic apex, where the purest inspiration vied with grievous self-sabotage.

AS THE '90S DAWNED, THINGS WERE LOOSE IN Shack world. Bassist Peter Wilkinson was going out with the Heads' sister Joanne when he was recruited. In summer 1990, prismatic 45 I Know You Well chimed with the short-lived baggy sounds of Madchester, but the album that would follow lays claim to the adjective 'timeless'.

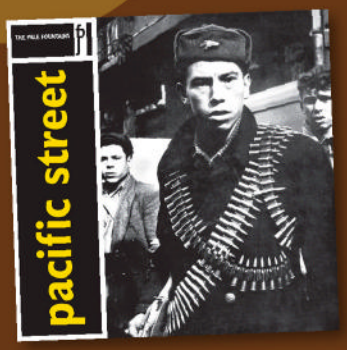
Recording *Waterpistol* took over two years at studios including The Chapel in Lincolnshire, Mike Hedges' home set-up in Willesden and Ghetto's Star Street. With stimulants vigorously consumed, chaos swirled. Wilkinson remembers being pushed out of a moving taxi by a bandmate. "It all got a bit messy," he laughs. "I think there was acid involved... there was always black eyes and fingers being bent back, and headlocks. We were all up to it."

In 1991, Wilkinson's drummer pal Jonny Baxter was recruited, with two weeks' notice, to play UK dates after Iain Templeton quit after "a massive barney" with Head. "I wasn't used to that ➢

Weather report: Head on-stage with Shack at Glastonbury, 1999.

loveandmersey

Head for heads: five essential albums picked by Ian Harrison.



the pale fountains

★★★★

pacific street

(Virgin, 1984)

This first transmission is an abandoned, over-reaching confluence of minty fresh indie-pop, Latin cadences, trumpets, spy themes, rave-ups and '60s urgency, finely balanced between the sophisto- and gauche. On earworms You'll Start A War and Abergele Next Time, Mick's youthful voice belies his already striking abilities: a record full of hope.

shack

★★★★★

waterpistol

(Marina, 1995)

Rarely has such intoxicating clarity been achieved so haphazardly: you could call it ultra-harmonious guitar pop but that would be missing the poetry and profundity of songs like Neighbours (the journey vs the arrival) and the tender Walter's Song, adapted from Charles Laughton's 1955 film noir The Night Of The Hunter.

michael head introducing the strands

★★★★★

the magical world of the strands

(Megaphone, 1998)

With repeated maritime motifs, a pastoral, narcotic jazz-folk dream containing some of Mick Head's most beauteous and transcendent songwriting, from the Gershwin-meets-Scott Walker Something Like You to a beatific reprise of Undecided, which umbilically links *...The Strands* with *Waterpistol*. John Head's Loaded Man, meanwhile, is a stark yet humane depiction of addiction.

shack

★★★★

here's tom with the weather

(North Country, 2003)

Made on a non-negotiable budget in six weeks, the Heads return to brisker, acoustic folk pop with their customary systemic sophistication, abundant heart and melodic appeal. Byrds Turn To Stone brings reflection and sweet reverie; elsewhere on the album, an Old West feel prevails, with Meant To Be and Chinatown transposing High Noon to historic Lancashire.

michael head & the red elastic band

★★★★

dear scott

(Modern Sky, 2022)

F. Scott Fitzgerald's Los Angeles and modern Liverpool co-exist in a filmic song cycle of Mersey jangle, strings and West Coast sunlight, realised by a super-simpatico band and producer. A reckoner of everything that's made Head great, in short. The Ten, meanwhile, salutes the bus route on which The Pale Fountains were named.

≺ whole, 'anything can happen at any time' thing," says Baxter, who recalls the band being paid in ecstasy at one continental gig. "Rehearsals could take eight hours, maybe more, and very little would get done. There was an abundance of white powder, people coming and going... You'd have to send search parties into town to look for Mick and John, in pubs. We were late for everything."

Your writer saw this line-up play songs that would appear on *Waterpistol* in an intense and feral show at Manchester University on May 17, 1991 with a wired Mick growling the lyrics, John playing squalling solos and Wilkinson thousand yard-staring like a Manson family auditionee (Mick blames a certain variety of "pink whizz" that was doing the rounds). Sessions at The Chapel, however, are recalled by Baxter with wonder.

"Most of the recordings were done in the middle of the night," he says. "It happened organically when Mick and John were in the zone. There was no script – it was all done in the moment, sitting around with guitars, literally writing a chorus there and then. Hazy started off as a jam – it didn't exist before we got into the studio. Listening back to it was incredible."

"*Waterpistol*," says Mick. "Beautiful memories. The time, the songs, they intertwine."

Does he remember producer Chris Allison locking him in the studio to finish his vocals?

"Chris knew I was gonna go AWOL," he says. "We were in the middle of nowhere, so it would have been a good few days to get me back there once I'd gone..."

Where were you going?

"I was going to score."

LOST IN THE ETHER BETWEEN THE STONE ROSES and Oasis, *Waterpistol* missed its moment. But a brush with legend was looming. Soon after You'll Never Walk Alone was filmed, French promoter Stéphane Bismuth asked Shack to back Arthur Lee in France and Britain. In conscious tribute to Love's macabre 1967 song The Red Telephone, negotiations with the US were made via a phone box, armed with a bag of pound coins. "Arthur's manager literally said, 'What songs do you know?'" says Head. "And I said, All of them. He said, 'I'm serious.' And I said, So am I."

The chemistry was immediate. Lee asked the Heads' sister Joanne to marry him ("after about two minutes") and only minor rehearsals were needed. "It all flooded back," says Head. "He was a beautiful man."

After riotously received shows with Lee in Paris, London and Liverpool in May 1992, Baxter stepped away from the group to play foxtrots and cha-chas with the Tower Ballroom band in Blackpool. Wilkinson had already jumped ship to join Cast. But Head had something else on his mind – a developing interest in heroin.

"Outside the window of the rehearsal room, there was a bottle bank, you know, with slots for clear, green, and brown bottles. And I did choose the brown. I made a conscious decision," he says. "My girlfriend says she's gonna leave me if I keep on doing it. But I'm going, I like this. I like these songs that are happening."

He must have known heroin would take him to terrible places?

"People had warned me," he says. "But I'm inquisitive, I need to find out for myself. There is a honeymoon period: all these things you think are going to happen, like the creativity, the beautiful dreams, the pretty colours, they *do* happen. And if you are a creative person, you can harness all that. But after a while, there's something more important, and that's your habit, and you've got to sort that out before you can even think about picking up a paintbrush or your guitar."

At this point, Head says he wrote every day, read at Liverpool's Central Library and listened enthralled to Elizabethan madrigals. Out of that phase came a transporting set of songs. "Queen Matilda, Hocken's Hey, The Prize..." he recalls, "they were all written in that beautiful mindset."

Sun-kissed and Love-like, the song X Hits The Spot anatomises this period, asking "What happened to all my clothes, what happened to all my furniture?" It would be a keystone of 1998's

"There is a honeymoon period with heroin: the beautiful dreams, the pretty colours, they *do* happen." Michael Head

The comeback kid: (above) Head today with the Red Elastic Band (from left) Tom Powell, Martin Smith, Mick, Nathaniel Cummings, Phil Murphy; (above left) Bill Ryder-Jones (left) wearing his producer's hat as Mick gets comfy during the recording of *Dear Scott* at Yawn Studios, The Wirral, 2021.

The Magical World Of The Strands, initially credited to Michael Head Introducing The Strands. A second masterpiece, its delicate, Lethean folk, jazz and pop was recorded in down time at Avid studios, a short walk from Liverpool's bombed-out church of St Luke's. Except it could just as easily have hailed from Paris in 1800. ("Go 'ead!" cackles Mick. "I'll have that").

John Head recalls a breakthrough when he and Mick were staying with Stéphane Bismuth in France. "He only had one guitar, a Norman Canadian, so whoever got up first played it," he says. "His girlfriend had a really old cello under the bed, it was forbidden fruit. But I just had to play *something*. It was this lovely summer's day in Paris, I started playing the bass on the cello, and it woke the sound for me."

When the Strands album finally made it out, to galling commercial indifference in 1998, Mick was addressing his drug problems and Shack were back in business. With high expectations from the London label and Templeton back in the fold, sublime comeback single Comedy and the coherent if protracted *HMS Fable* arrived in 1999. It was followed by the fresher *Here's Tom With The Weather* (2003) and 2006's pleasingly hare-brained *On The Corner Of Miles And Gil*, released on Noel Gallagher's Sour Mash label and produced by old pal Yorkie. None crossed over, and Mick was soon in the woods again.

"I hit the bottle big time," he says. "I got lost. You're feeling sorry for yourself, you're not in the mood to be picking up the guitar. In fact, you look at your guitar with derision. A dark period, really. But I still wrote."

After the opiated dreams of The Strands, Head concedes the songs that came while waiting for the off-licence to open were negligible. But again, helped by two friends he calls "angels", he came back from the brink.

"After detox, you start to feel again," he says. "I was even getting emotional over Carry On Up The Khyber when they think Jim Dale's dead and he's just asleep. Bizarre! Your fucking emotions are just flooding back. Then, you pick the guitar up."

SINCE 2013, IT'S FAIR TO SAY the emotions have continued to flow. They've been channelled by Head and a new ensemble – the Red Elastic Band – on two LP releases so far, including MOJO's 2022 Album Of The Year, *Dear Scott*. That album began a collaboration with Bill Ryder-Jones, who's also produced impending – and, whisper it, superb – new album *Loophole*.

"You could feed half of Liverpool off Mick's positive energy if you could find a way to harness it," says Ryder-Jones, who was in The Coral when he first met Michael in 2003. "I've never seen someone's energy go from calm to super-hyped up so quickly, and it's normally when music or literature is involved. It just turns something on in him, quite strange to see, but beautiful obviously. He just fucking vibrates."

These days Michael is also keeping family close. His daughter Alice, who can be seen as a tiny child singing Over The Rainbow with her grandmother on French TV in 1992, is managing him, and his son Arlo is doing his sleeve art. Wilkinson has co-written Merry Go Round on *Loophole*, and he, Mick and John all have a "never say never" attitude to Shack, though Templeton, sadly, died in 2022.

Mick laughs heartily when MOJO posits that as he has never had any big hits, he is under no obligation to play any of his songs, and has a freedom his peers would envy. But if aficionados all agree he should be a household name, he still thinks he's been lucky, despite the locust years, squandered opportunities and splendid failures.

"It's *c'est la vie*, isn't it?" he reasons. "It's just the way it went. You can't change anything, and things happen for reasons. And the shit I've put myself through over time… right now? I'm just loving the future."

Loophole will be released by Modern Sky in May. Ciao Ciao Bambino: A Magical Memoir by Michael Head will be published by Nine Eight Books in August. Visit shacksongs.co.uk for Shack info. Peter Wilkinson's label is av8recordsltd.co.uk. Paul Simpson's memoir Revolutionary Spirit is published by Jawbone.

Getty, John Johnson (2)

THE WISE GUYS

A 10-PAGE CELEBRATION

WALK-ON PARTS FOR CHARLIE PARKER, THE opera singer Cathy Berberian, and a basketball player called Jungle Jim Loscutoff. Location visits to Annandale in upstate New York and the caves of Altamira in Spain. A drinks menu stocked with kirschwasser, retsina, Cuervo Gold tequila and Tanqueray gin. A ride on the Wolverine train out of New York. And, most delightful of all, a Japanese dildo invented by William Burroughs – the "Steely Dan III from Yokohama".

The world that Walter Becker and Donald Fagen evoke in the songs of Steely Dan resembles a connoisseur's take on the American 20th century, at once snarky and affectionate, cynical and surreptitiously moral. Their songs encapsulate high art and low lives; their albums have the wit, heft, erudition and resonance of Great American Novels; their chops, of course, are consummate. Over nine studio albums, Steely Dan provided the perfect soundtrack for upwardly-mobile lifestyles, while simultaneously skewering the venality and pretension that at least some of their listeners aspired to.

A very smart trick, and few artists in MOJO's pantheon have been smarter than Becker and Fagen. The pair met in 1967 in Annandale, students at Bard College who began playing with what Fagen called in his memoir "the funky grooves, the jazz chords and the sensibility of the lyrics which seemed to fall somewhere between Tom Lehrer and [Nabokov's] Pale Fire."

Over the next half-century, with a vast supporting cast of gifted musicians and the odd solo hiatus, Steely Dan parlayed that undergraduate vision into subversion on a multi-platinum scale. Complexity becomes them to this day – as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Pretzel Logic* and Fagen embarks on another season of touring with his current line-up – and consequently, the wisdom of ranking their songs seems a little gauche: one can imagine the late Becker's droll contempt for such a folly. Nevertheless: "You say it's a crazy scheme," to pluck a little wisdom from Deacon Blues. "This one's for real. . ."

MAJOR DUDES:

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INTERVIEWS BY:
Bill DeMain

Illustration by Del Gentleman and Mark Wagstaff, Getty

STEELY DAN
BLACK FRIDAY
Steely Dan
RIKKI DON'T LOSE THAT NUMBER
STEELY DAN
countdown to ecstasy
STEELY DAN
show biz kid / razor boy
STEELY DAN
My Old School
Steely Dan
STEELY DAN
Pretzel Logic
STEELY DAN
Katy Lied
STEELY DAN
The Royal Scam
STEELY DAN
Aja
STEELY DAN
Gaucho
STEELY DAN
Peg
STEELY DAN
Aja
STEELY DAN
Gaucho

THE 30 GREATEST STEELY DAN SONGS

30 TRANS-ISLAND SKYWAY

(from Donald Fagen, *Kamakiriad*, 1993)

Speculative friction, and a serendipitous reunion.

The gleaming future that never arrived as promised has been a constant source of disappointment for boomers. Odd, then, that so much of notorious cynic Donald Fagen's solo work has revisited his teenage fantasies. Exhibit A: the syncopated pulse of *Kamakiriad*'s opening track, a be-bop sophisticate's ideal of the perfect car ("The frame is out of Glasgow/The tech is Balinese"). So far, so smoothly transporting. But nestling in Trans-Island Skyway's credits is an old friend destined to thwart the idealism: Walter Becker, producing, back alongside Fagen 13 bumpy years after *Gaucho*. *JM*

29 SIGN IN STRANGER

(from *The Royal Scam*, 1976)

A whole new identity, but at what price? Don and Walt aren't saying.

In this futuristic crime saga, Fagen and Becker speak of reformative and escapist opportunities for an outlaw zombie. But what knocks this deep cut up to the Dan's top shelf are the compelling zig-zagging melody, plus masterful accompaniment and solos by the late piano pro Paul Griffin and searing guitarist Elliott Randall. The latter's modulated outro is utterly thrilling and kicked into the stratosphere by powerful horn charts, yet another example of Steely Dan's singular musicality. *MSi*

28 COUSIN DUPREE

(from *Two Against Nature*, 2000)

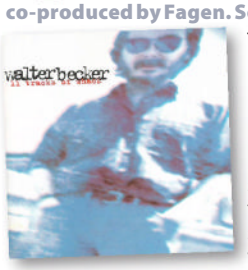
The kings of smut-rock take on another taboo.

No doubt the only pop song addressing intra-family sex to win a Grammy Award. When the protagonist tries to seduce his cousin while watching her "wax her skis", she slyly scorns him, nailing "the skeevy look in your eyes" and "the dreary architecture of your soul". Walter shines on a slinky guitar and a funky bass, reminding us again what a terrific instrumentalist he was, while Fagen's stepdaughter Amy Helm whistles during the bridge – appropriately keeping it in the family. *MSi*

27 BOOK OF LIARS

(from *11 Tracks Of Whack*, 1994)

Sung by Walter Becker, co-produced by Fagen. Sounds like...



Tellingly, after Becker died in 2017, Fagen paid tribute by introducing (or, more accurately, re-introducing) one solo Becker track into the Steely Dan live set. It's easy to see why it was Book Of Liars. Like the rest of the Fagen co-produced *11 Tracks Of Whack*, it's unashamedly Dan-esque, although more spartan, but it's the album's highlight. It glides majestically, Becker adds a touch of cynicism ("There's a star in the book of liars by your name") and the rest glows, albeit while glowering. *JA*

Ed Caraeff/Iconic Images

"THEY'RE LOOKING FOR A *FEEL*"

Latterday Dan trumpeter/MD Michael Leonhart on the Tao of Walt and Don.

"In 1996, Walter and Donald hired me as a trumpet player for their touring band. Two years in, I began helping with the arrangements. We explored songs from *Aja* and *Gaucho*. But it wasn't like this anal thing of making sure they were exactly like the record. It was, 'Let's go for the *spirit* of the record.'

Was it an easier time, for them, making *Two Against Nature* than *Gaucho*? Let's not be Pollyanna. These are two sensitive, brilliant, mercurial guys, both with great senses of humour. It's not that it would be *easier*. But maybe it wouldn't be as awful! They were like friends who'd been on a road trip, and one of them got their leg bitten off by a bear, and said, 'Let's not do that again.' Twenty years later, they go, 'Want to drive up Highway 1 and we'll try it again?'

That says a lot about them and how they look at life. They don't take it that seriously. The art is profound, yes. But in terms of the success and the business? They're way too smart to get sucked into that.

The main thing I've learned in my 28 years with them? Patience. Everyone thinks of Steely Dan as perfectionists. They're after something beyond that. It's all based on the ear. They're looking for a *feel*, with laser-like focus and attention to detail. No matter how long it takes. They have an idea of the music in their heads, and they want to sound as close to that as is humanly possible."

26 THINGS I MISS THE MOST

(from *Everything Must Go*, 2003)

More First World Problems from the poets of same.

Post-divorce, Fagen's jaded avatar itemises the good things that have walked out the door ("the talk, the sex, somebody to trust…") segueing drolly into the material losses ("the Audi TT, the house on the Vineyard…") – superlative songcraft chops suggesting Cole Porter via Randy Newman in a tune as catchy as any the Dan ever wrote. In 2003, Fagen had been married to Libby Titus for a decade, and appears to remain so. Maybe he found his own song salutary. *DE*

25 ONLY A FOOL WOULD SAY THAT

(from *Can't Buy A Thrill*, 1972)

Impossible dreams hit the buffers of merciless reality? Could be.

To a 'luded up, oddly rueful bossa amble, Fagen examines his nails, turns, and looks over his shades to reflect on utopia. From one angle, it seems to dismiss the hippy elite's unrealisable Aquarian ideals and contempt for the bill-paying 9-to-5 schlub (one theory is it relates to Lennon at his white piano imagining no possessions). From another, the do-nothing cynic brigade is hoist by its own petard. A curious hint of murder, as the jazz guitars sparkle on the motel pool. *IH*

24 KING OF THE WORLD

(from *Countdown To Ecstasy*, 1973)

Drivetime music, post-apocalypse style.

The grimly humorous lyric describes a survivor of a nuclear holocaust holed up for safety, re-reading bad news in "last year's papers", and trying to contact others via an old radio with intent to drive "through the ruins of Santa Fe". It showcases early Dan as a cooking band, the interplay between Walter Becker's ebullient bass and Jim Hodder's limber drums matched by Jeff Baxter's wah wah chordwork and Denny Dias's fluid lead lines, while Donald Fagen's synth melody adds a melancholic twist. *MBa*

23 EVERYONE'S GONE TO THE MOVIES

(from *Katy Lied*, 1975)

Break out the popcorn with Donald and Walter's skin-flick creep.

A percussive bromance between drum prodigy Jeff Porcaro, 20, and vibraphone veteran Victor Feldman, 40, the Dan's queasy tale of underage corruption vastly improves upon both their 1971 demo and their inspiration Frank Zappa's similar celebrations of sleaze. Despite darkly funny/deeply triggering verses whose insinuating enticement to join Mr Lapage "showing his films in the den" is echoed in a snaky saxophone licking your ear, the chorus is singalong pop heaven. "Now we're alone at last," indeed. *MSn*

22 GLAMOUR PROFESSION

(from *Gaucho*, 1980)

The glory years of cocaine being good for you, spoiled.

To the most machine-smooth, lightest-stepping, jazz-disco production, a tale of coke dealing, from snorting ballplayer Hoops McCann all the way to cartel sales rep Jive Miguel, via showbiz parties, a smuggler's yacht and, by inference, the heart attack emergency room. Best bit: when the old nose candy actually speaks, and declares "Hollywood, I know your middle name." A towering, immaculate piece of we-told-ya-so Dan snark, it makes the whole amoral mess sound alluring, and encourages speculation on the identities of the protagonists. *IH*

Every day is like Friday: Donald Fagen and Walter Becker enjoy artistic licence at Village Recorders studio, Los Angeles, 1975.

THE DAN IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE DAN, DECREES DAVE DiMARTINO.

21 BLACK FRIDAY

(from Katy Lied, 1975)

IN THE USA, the term 'Black Friday' currently connotes: 1) that November day after Thanksgiving when early Christmas shoppers traditionally score their best deals; 2) that fateful week in 1929 when the Great Depression kicked in; and 3) most notably, that notorious day back in 1869, when the price of gold fell by 20 per cent, the stock market crashed, and panic was, as always, widespread.

In related news, it's also one of Steely Dan's very best songs.

The opening track of *Katy Lied* – the band's fourth album, appropriately bearing a katydid, or bush cricket, on its cover – it marks the debut of Steely Dan the duo and the exit of Steely Dan the band. With the departures of guitarist Jeff Baxter and drummer Jim Hodder, and guitarist Denny Dias seemingly relegated to a minimal presence, Walter Becker and Donald Fagen would pilot their fully gassed-up car alone from that point forward. And significantly, with a host of exemplary musicians to choose from, Black Friday's searing guitar leads (and bass) are provided by none other than Becker himself, and their howling fluidity and conciseness are remarkable even now. Who needed another guitarist?

It's fitting that the first track unleashed post-band would take up The End Of The World As We Know It as its subject matter: while panicked execs leap from high-rise windows, the song's shady protagonist is announcing his plans to depart this world of high finance, fly to Australia, take off his socks and shoes and feed the kangaroos until the whole mess blows over. It is a completely Dannian masterwork: quirky characters (including an anonymous Archbishop), quirky actions (striking all "the big red words from my little black book") and quirky afterthoughts ("I guess I'll change my name").

"IT IS A COMPLETELY DANNIAN MASTERWORK: QUIRKY CHARACTERS, QUIRKY ACTIONS AND QUIRKY AFTER-THOUGHTS."

And one of Black Friday's marvels is how very much it sounds like it was written just yesterday. The grey men "diving from the fourteenth floor" now evoke visions of the World Trade Center on 9/11. Hiding from civilisation in the outback could be someone's legitimate Covid-avoidance strategy. Digging a hole and laying down in it until you satisfy your soul has been around since the Neanderthals. Some things never change.

Though there were technical issues in the recording of *Katy Lied* that would mar its making for the band and producer Gary Katz – it's "not what we recorded," Katz told me back in 1984 – sonically, it *is* a marvel.

And 'Black Friday'? From its dual piano fade-in, courtesy of sessioneers David Paich and Michael Omartian, to the vocals provided by Fagen and vital new addition Michael McDonald, and the driving beat of drummer Jeff Porcaro, then just 20, Steely Dan the band may have broken up, but Steely Dan the *recording* artists had never sounded stronger.

THE 30 GREATEST STEELY DAN SONGS

20 DOCTOR WU
(from *Katy Lied*, 1975)

Doctor Who, more like. Wu remains a cypher.

A personification of Katie's dope habit? A shrink who abuses his power? The protagonist's saviour when he was "halfway crucified"? Across the years, Becker and Fagen delighted in explanational obfuscation. Bell-tree shimmers and Phil Woods' alto sax elevate the airbrushed elegance, Michael McDonald found his bv part thrilling, but challenging, and Katy's denial (of her drug use? Of an affair with Wu?) provided the title of Steely Dan's fourth album. Probably the only pop song to use the word "piaster", too. *JMc*

19 BLACK COW
(from *Aja*, 1977)

A cryptic break-up song. "Self-explanatory," says Donald Fagen.

The music sounds like it could be playing in the bar where the narrator tells his partner he's had enough of her infidelity. She downs her black cow – a coke float – before splitting, as the backing singers sweetly coo their commentary. This drama takes place over a doozy of a groove by drum maestro Bernard Purdie, known for bringing a sign into sessions proclaiming "You done hired the hitmaker." Black Cow wasn't a hit, but picked up plenty of FM airplay as the B-side of Josie. *MBa*

18 BARRYTOWN
(from *Pretzel Logic*, 1974)

Mind the generation gap, please.

This could be the opening theme to a '70s sitcom. That sporty piano figure. The throwback feelgood melody. A lyric that unfolds like a montage of some balding, middle-aged square shaking his head and fist at the hi-jinks of next-gen hipsters. Barrytown is near Bard College, Becker and Fagen's alma mater. So maybe there's some autobiography here? Fagen – who wrote this by himself – demurred, saying, "It's fiction. I used the name because I liked the sound of it." *BD*

17 HEY NINETEEN
(from *Gaucho* LP, 1980)

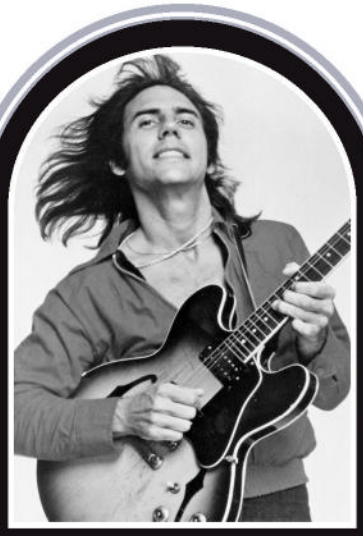
No fool like an old fool, argues the Dan's longest-charting hit.

Over Rick Marotta's puckered drums and aptly smug stabs of guitar, a song-cycle of characters in decline, *Gaucho*'s lead single featured a boomer realising that his most impressive status symbol, the much-younger girlfriend, is a poor fit. She doesn't know who Aretha Franklin is. The pair can't even dance together, a distance even copious amounts of "Cuervo Gold" and "fine Colombian" can only hope to bridge. "Older-guy/younger-gal stories always make us laugh," Fagen explained; another failed May-to-December tryst featured on Cousin Dupree. *SC*

16 HAITIAN DIVORCE
(from *The Royal Scam*, 1976)

"Now we dolly back/Now we fade to black." For who can bear to look?

The pukka skank; the toothsome allure of Dean Parks' chewy talk-box spicing – here was an untypically tropical Dan sketching Babs and Clean Willie's wham, bam, bust story with dazzling thrift. A verse in and they're divorced; verse two sees Babs neck zombies and seduce a new fling. Alas, the uncertain paternity of the child she's conceived will nix her and Willie's verse three reunion. "If you can say 'incompatibility of character' in French you're as good as gold," claimed Fagen re actual divorce in Haiti. *JMc*



"THEY WERE THE COMPLETE PACKAGE"

Key Dan axeman Larry Carlton on energy, sophistication and Third World Man.

"In 1975, I'd arranged rhythm tracks for Joan Baez's album *Diamonds & Rust*. Walter heard it, and called me to play on *Katy Lied*. I did two takes on Bad Sneakers. Donald was at the console, and said, 'Do you know how many guys we had come in and play that part? We're finished!' That showed me we agreed on what music could be between us. Later I asked Walter, How'd you guys happen to call me? He said, 'I'm not a Joan Baez fan, but I wanted to hear the guy that could make her sound that good.'

In my opinion, the guitarists they hired were the perfect marriage of rock energy and sophistication. Really, all the studio guys they chose were just a bunch of pros at the peak of their powers. I know everyone remembers Kid Charlemagne, but Third World Man [on *Gaucho*] is my favourite song I did with them. Just that damn solo. We doubled it and it just took on a vibe. It's so melodic, so simple. It's not blowing through the changes. It's just its own melody. Every time it comes on, I go, Yeah, that's cool!

I think Steely Dan had the right songs with the right sound at the right time. The guys were diligent about making those songs exactly the way they wanted – Donald, harmonically and Walter, lyrically. They didn't care how long it took, how much money it cost. And that paid off. It was just all there. The complete package."

15 FM (NO STATIC AT ALL)
(1978, single)

A radio staple about how radio sucks.

"It just has to be about FM radio," was the loose guidance from the Hollywood moguls who commissioned the theme to FM, which starred Martin Mull as a quixotic DJ taking a stand against The Man. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the song – cut during sessions for *Aja* – took a more cynical view of the DJ's purpose, seeing them as purveyors of "funked-up Muzak" and noting "the girls don't seem to care what's on". The movie was a flop, but the soundtrack went platinum. *SC*

14 SHOW BIZ KIDS
(from *Countdown To Ecstasy*, 1973)

So disdainful, it can barely be bothered changing chords.

As simplistic as Steely Dan ever got. Jim Hodder's metronomic groove – a cousin of Nilsson's Coconut – is a skeleton through which Rick Derringer's sizzling slide guitar blows inexorably. This time, the singer's sitting targets – the cool, rich scions of Hollywood (clad in Steely Dan T-shirts, natch) – party "while the poor people sleepin'". The pay-off – "They don't give a fuck about anybody else" – repeated over 50 times in Super Furry Animals' 1996 single The Man Don't Give A Fuck, is about as satisfying a mantra as there is. *DE*

13 DIRTY WORK
(from *Can't Buy A Thrill*, 1972)

Working for Donald and Walter is a sordid business.

It's a resigned lament, a freeway elegy sung by someone on their way to get fucked. By all accounts, Becker and Fagen didn't like the song so they gave it to David Palmer. So when Palmer sings "I'm a fool to do your dirty work" against that funeral-parlour organ and second-line brass section he's a weary free-for-hire gigolo but also Becker and Fagen's rent boy. You hear that wretched cool in his delivery. He's a fool to do their dirty work, but he's the only one who can. *AM*

12 BABYLON SISTERS
(from *Gaucho*, 1980)

The end of the line, so to speak.

A destination song heavy with oppressive polish. Narratively, it's two guys driving west on Sunset to hook up with the titular "so fine, so young" siblings. But everything here – those muted *noir* horns, mocking backing vocals, Bernard Purdie's stoned reggae shuffle, the slow rhumba of Randy Brecker's flugelhorn, that Gatsby detail ("Distant lights from across the bay") – tell us they're never going to make it. It took 250 mixes to get this song 'right'. You hear exhaustion in every perfect melancholy detail. *AM*

Future tense: Donald Fagen contemplates internal affairs.

A WARY NOSTALGIST FINDS HIS SOLO GROOVE. BY JOHN MULVEY.

11

NEW FRONTIER

(from Donald Fagen, The Nightfly, 1982)

PATHOLOGICAL SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS might have been key to Steely Dan, but personal honesty mostly seemed beneath them. For his first solo album, however, Donald Fagen tried out a different strategy. "I think it's possible to be more personal and subjective when you're working by yourself," he told NME a few months after *The Nightfly*'s October 1982 release. To that end, the album came with a sleevenote promising, "The songs on this album represent certain fantasies that might have been entertained by a young man growing up in the remote suburbs of a northeastern city during the late '50s and early '60s, ie, one of my general height, weight and build."

The action of side two, track one takes place on the cusp of that revolutionary decade, informed by John F Kennedy's speech to the Democratic Convention in 1960. "I'm asking each of you to be pioneers towards that New Frontier," Kennedy proposed. "Can we carry through in an age where we will witness not only new breakthroughs in weapons of destruction, but also a race for mastery of the sky and the rain, the ocean and the tides, the far side of space, and the inside of men's minds?"

Boundless optimism. Existential threat. Kennedy's grand themes could reverberate in the most sedate environs, not least Passaic, New Jersey. It is here, or somewhere very like it, that the drama of Fagen's New Frontier plays out. Our hero plots a "wingding" in his father's fallout shelter, a date with a girl who will be seduced by his scholarly enthusiasm for Dave Brubeck. The song vibrates with possibility: sex, escape to the city, a transformed future, all potentially compromised by Cold War anxieties.

As in subject matter, so in sound. New Frontier, like the rest of *The Nightfly*, presents a stainless digital reimagining of how jazz, rather than rock'n'roll, could have underpinned the evolution of pop. "I think jazz died for me sometime in the mid '60s," Fagen told NME, but here it feels folded into what came next. It's a song in constant forward motion: organic and programmed sounds in uncanny harmony; Larry Carlton's guitar flecks like speed blurs on a never-ending freeway.

"THE SONG VIBRATES WITH POSSIBILITY: SEX, ESCAPE TO THE CITY, A TRANSFORMED FUTURE."

The candour is at least superficially overwhelmed by the dynamics, but even this degree of soul-baring proved traumatic for Fagen. "After delivering *The Nightfly* to Warner Brothers, I came apart like a cheap suit," he wrote in his 2013 memoir, Eminent Hipsters. Panic attacks and depressive episodes would persist through most of the 1980s, followed by a suppression of autobiographical content on later records. By the time he returned in solo raiment with *Kamakiriad* in 1993, Fagen's adolescent love of sci-fi had fashioned a techscape of supercars and skyways – an idealised new frontier, untroubled by reality, into which the cautious world-builder could disappear completely.

Getty, Dalle APRF/IconicPix

THE 30 GREATEST STEELY DAN SONGS

10 BODHISATTVA
(from *Countdown To Ecstasy*, 1973)

The hipster dharma according to Skunk and Denny.

The rock band as ultra-compacted Duke Ellington Orchestra, living out their fantasies in hyper-accelerated swingtime. Fagen and Becker's sarcastic take on the rich hippy quest for enlightenment is pointed, but it's the *Countdown*-era quintet in full flow that makes Bodhisattva so remarkable, especially guitarists Denny Dias and Skunk Baxter trading harmonised riffs and solos. "Dias the Bebopper meets Baxter the skunk beneath the Bo Tree in this altered blues," explained the sleevenotes, though comparing them to an uptown Duane Allman and Dickey Betts works, too. Has virtuosity ever sounded so exhilarating? *JM*

9 ANY MAJOR DUDE WILL TELL YOU
(from *Pretzel Logic*, 1974)

A dude abides and empathises.

Like Woody Allen and Neil Simon, Becker and Fagen used the '70s comic trope of the New Yorker transplanted in Los Angeles, uncomfortably awash in sunshine and alfalfa sprouts. And in this song, the West Coast sobriquet of "dude". The music is appropriately bi-coastal, Laurel Canyon feathery acoustics dovetailing with urban Wurlitzer stabs, as Chuck Rainey's James Jamerson-like bass fastens it together. In one of a long line of fanciful/abstruse usages, there's a reference to a mythical tear-dissolving creature that had the musicians whispering, "What's a squonk?" *BD*

8 MY OLD SCHOOL
(from *Countdown To Ecstasy*, 1973)

Best buddies bemoan Bard bust.

Fagen and Becker first met at Bard College, a bohemian school in upstate New York. In 1968, the local fuzz busted dormitories of long-haired students for marijuana possession, including F & B. Furious at the school's co-operation with the oinks, the duo wrote this catchy fuck-you. (The "Daddy Gee" namechecked was Assistant District Attorney G Gordon Liddy, a future Watergate "burglar".) Despite singing "I'm never going back to my old school," Fagen returned in 1985, wryly explaining "I'm not one to hold a grudge." *MS*

7 AJA
(from *Aja*, 1977)

So much going on, but so subtly. A warm bath of a song.

After a lengthy separation, *Aja* the album marked Steely Dan's divorce from rock, but its eight-minute centrepiece (the longest Dan song until West Of Hollywood) was their impeccably produced jazz-rock zenith. Lyrically a (sort-of) tribute to the sounds of Asia ("Chinese music always sets me free"), this was music to luxuriate in over the long distance. Beyond Fagen's vocals and Denny Dias's final Steely Dan moment, Steve Gadd and Wayne Shorter respectively delivered drum and saxophone solos of other-worldly quality. *JA*

Getty

"PEG WAS MADDENING!"

Doobies/Dan master singer Michael McDonald on the ultimate 'improvementalists'.

"When I first heard My Old School, I thought, This is my favourite group since The Beatles. In 1973, Jeff Porcaro got me an audition for their touring band. That audition became our first rehearsal. Walter and Donald were very down to earth, no Mr Big vibes. Their sleeves were rolled up, and they had a unified idea of what the band should sound like. It was pretty much their way or the highway.

If they didn't enjoy touring, it was because they knew they were never going to be completely satisfied. I've never been in a band as motivated toward improvement. People say they were perfectionists. I think they were 'improvementalists'. Donald might've been a reluctant singer at first. But like most singers I love, he found his voice. He came from the essence of the song, and fashioned his voice around that.

In the studio, they were the first to utilise me singing with myself on a background part. It created kind of an ethereal-sounding harmony – almost like they made a keyboard from my voice. We did that on Rose Darling, Bad Sneakers and Peg. Peg was maddening! It was really hard to keep those close harmony parts in my head. Then the phrasing could have such nuance – fine points of pronunciation, vibrato, no vibrato. I said, Donald, if you don't mind, can I just sing one part at a time, double it, then move on, without hearing the previous one? But hearing it back after hours of work, it just sounded great.

As songwriters, they opened my mind, harmonically. In the Doobie Brothers, Donald's chord voicings kind of became my go-to. How that band, of all bands, became darlings of Top 40 radio for 30 years? It's unheard of."

Michael McDonald's memoir What A Fool Believes is published by Dey Street, May 2024.

6 DEACON BLUES
(from *Aja*, 1977)

Of them all, this is the one that cuts deep.

Encapsulates all that Steely Dan excelled at: spotless and gorgeous playing, rich in the romance of jazz, and a lyric narrated by a character that is, sad to say, something of a loser. In this world, living the best life includes playing the saxophone, drinking Scotch whisky all night long, getting overly emotional while soloing, and then, inevitably, dying in a tragic car wreck. Unexpectedly, both lyric and music pierce the heart like few other songs ever have. *DD*

5 RIKKI, DON'T LOSE THAT NUMBER
(from *Pretzel Logic*, 1974)

Dan get vulnerable and score their biggest US single – a coincidence?

Misanthropic Fagen stands down for this unrequited crush on writer Rikki Ducornet (wife of his Bard College professor), inspiring a mix of longing, urgency and even machismo ("you don't wanna call nobody else") draped in seamless folds of samba pop. A luminous flapamba (something like a marimba) intro sets up a left-hand piano riff as-close-as-this to Horace Silver's Song For My Father – Fagen thinks he filched it from Sérgio Mendes – but the trade-off between tender verse and escalating chorus is entirely Dan's. PS: she never called. *MA*

4 DO IT AGAIN
(from *Can't Buy A Thrill*, 1972)

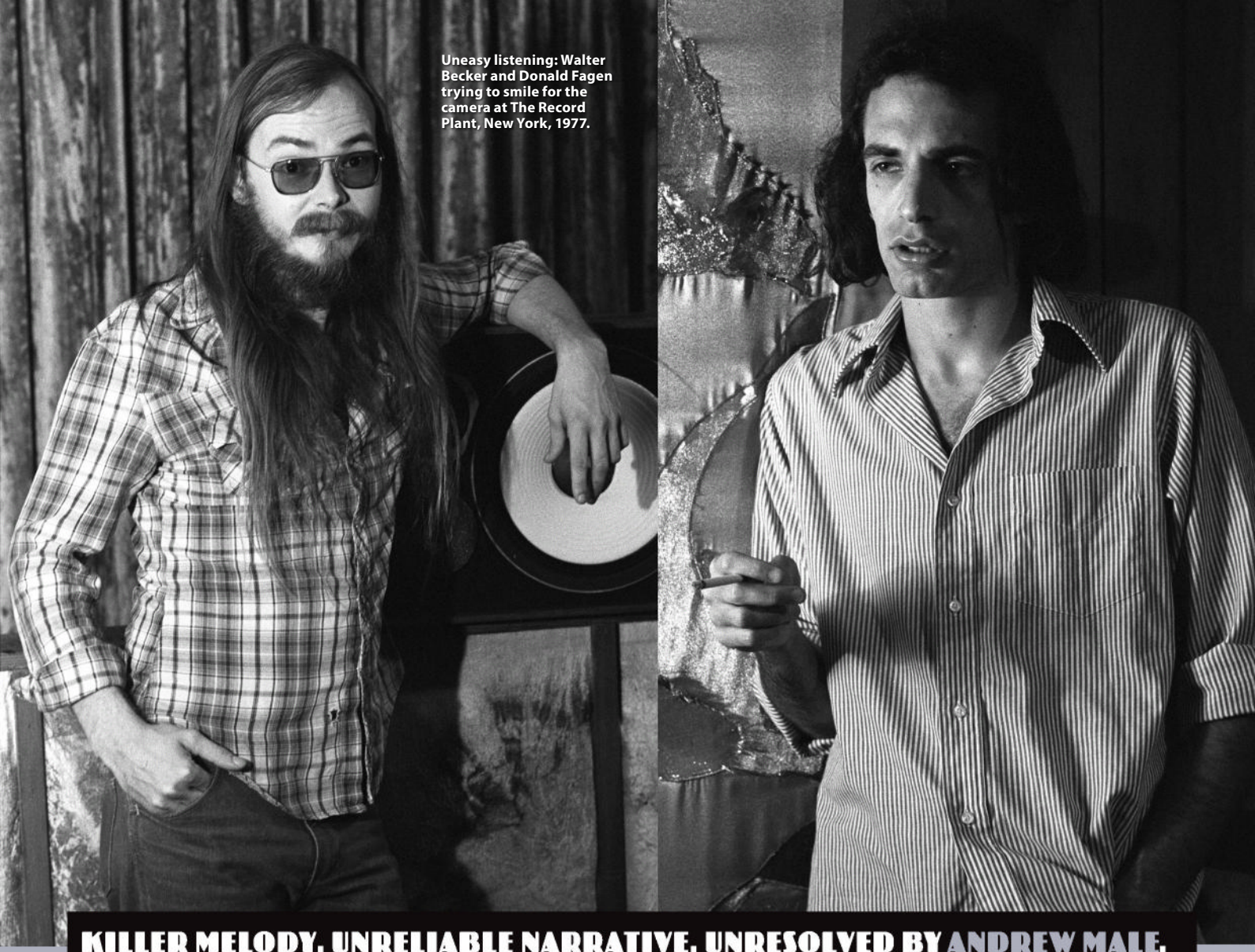
No point hitting the road, Jack – you keep coming back.

Album one, track one: pulling your body one way, your mind the other, in seconds Steely Dan announce a career of ambiguity. Skinsmen Jim Hodder and Victor Feldman percolate an irresistible bossa nova while Fagen's dark electric piano in G minor glowers with foreboding, his semi-desperate voice pitching scenarios of frontier revenge, cheated lover and gambling addict that show everyman Jack doomed to repeat his mistakes, the "wheel turnin'" with Buddhist fatalism. On Coral electric sitar, Denny Dias sizzles. *MSn*

3 KID CHARLEMAGNE
(from *The Royal Scam*, 1975)

The downfall of a psychedelic Walter White.

The devil and the Dan are in the details. Here, it's the "kerosene/kitchen-clean" rhyme. Never heard in a century's worth of popular song, yet perfectly chosen to encapsulate and foreshadow the rise and fall of what Becker called "an Owsley-esque figure, an outlaw acid chief of the '60s". Add in a groove that bubbles like a Bunsen-fired beaker, that rare falsetto flip from Fagen and a slalom guitar solo from Larry Carlton, and you've got one for the ages. *BD*



Uneasy listening: Walter Becker and Donald Fagen trying to smile for the camera at The Record Plant, New York, 1977.

KILLER MELODY, UNRELIABLE NARRATIVE, UNRESOLVED BY ANDREW MALE.

2 PEG

(from Aja, 1977)

TALKING TO pianist Warren Bernhardt in 1993, Donald Fagen described Peg as a "major blues", referencing the '50s ballads of Ray Charles and Bobby 'Blue' Bland but pointing out that he'd added some Amen! gospel chords to the mix as well. 'Major Blues' is a pretty good description of Peg as a whole. A downer song turned bright, great and radical. There are enough books out there that will tell you that Peg substitutes plagal cadences for each of the standard three chords of a 12-bar blues and that the cadences don't resolve strongly on downbeats, but all that really comes down to is "a major blues", where the song's harmony is at cross-purposes with its downbeat structure. And Peg is a song that is all about cross-purposes. Listen to that opening: bright, jaunty, layered, glossy; a complex jazz-rock structure passing itself off as casual FM groove.

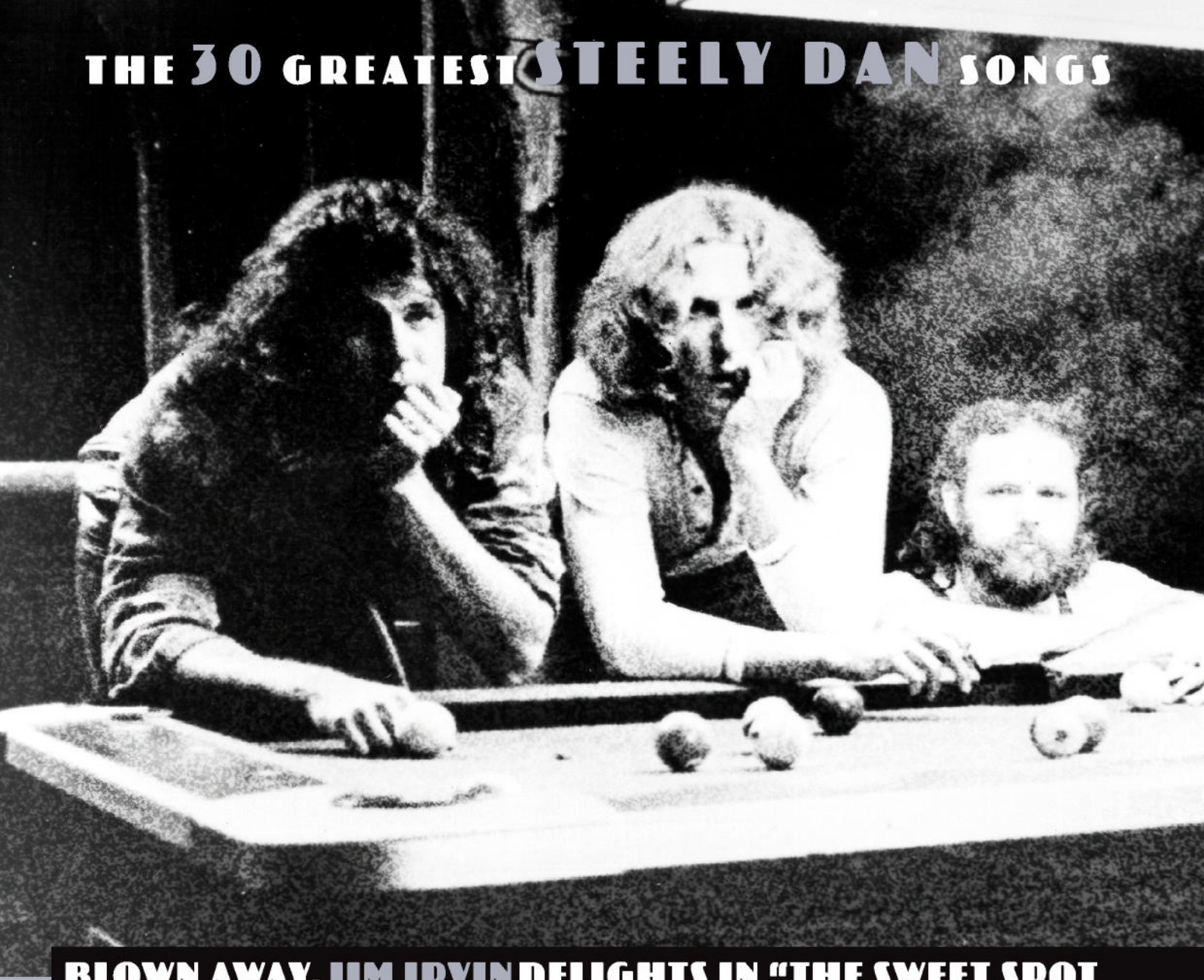
Then listen to those lyrics: "I've seen your picture/Your name in lights above it/This is your big debut/It's like a dream come true." It's a big day for someone, but not, you suspect, Peg herself. That's a complex person trying to pass themselves off as smooth and casual and suddenly, all that jauntiness starts to sound like false bonhomie.

Speaking to The Wall Street Journal in 2020, Fagen said that Peg "takes place at a seedy photo shoot in LA in the 1950s. All of the lyrics are from the perspective of the jilted boyfriend, who [is] still hanging around with the starlet on the way up." This boyfriend is also that buoyant insistent melody; he isn't going anywhere and you are not going to get rid of him.

As with all the best Steely Dan songs, no one telling the story here is reliable, not the boyfriend, not Fagen, not the music that soundtracks the narrative. As Fagen says elsewhere in that WSJ interview, "[Walter Becker and I] like creating the sensation of a story through word fragments that [aren't] too literal", and as with Akira Kurosawa's 1950 film Rashomon, Peg is a shady tale told from different perspectives. Beyond Becker and Fagen's lyrics, beyond its bright compact packaging, multiple dark interpretations are being given. You can hear it from the off, in the slightly uneasy blend of Paul Griffin's Fender Rhodes and Don Grolnick's clavinet; the surreptitious oily slaps of Chuck Rainey's bass; the dry synth-generated melancholy hook of Tom Scott's Lyricon; different voices of slick unease. Most striking in that respect are Michael McDonald's backing vocal harmonies – a tight, echoing excess of simpatico suavity that feels almost claustrophobic – and Jay Graydon's rough-assed Polynesian-style ascending guitar solo, which brings what Fagen now refers to as a "Stravinsky-like" anarchy to the airless closed-set order of the Peg narrative. But, as De La Soul proved, what remains is that melody, Tom Scott's jaunty Lyricon hook and those words, those sinister words, the chorus as karmic curse: "Peg, it will come back to you."

"IT'S A BIG DAY FOR SOMEONE, BUT NOT, YOU SUSPECT, PEG HERSELF."

Henry Diltz



BLOWN AWAY, JIM IRVIN DELIGHTS IN "THE SWEET SPOT

1 REELIN' IN THE YEARS

(from Can't Buy A Thrill, 1972)

SHORTLY AFTER *CAN'T BUY A THRILL* was released, Denny Dias, the guitarist who'd once placed an ad in the Village Voice looking for a keyboard and bass player and had it answered by Donald Fagen and Walter Becker, foretold something to a reporter: "I may be a perfectionist but [this] is the worst album we'll ever make." Of all their records, it may indeed be the group's most hurried, least focused – what with its three lead vocalists – but there's something elementally satisfying about Steely Dan's first utterance that makes it a perfect entry point for new fans. Dias said he stopped writing songs when he first heard Don and Walter's work – "like hearing The Beatles with jazz chords" – but even he was taken aback when the record he considered comparatively scrappy yielded two huge hit singles, both of which remain reliable crowd-pleasers half a century later.

In this case at least, perhaps he was right to be surprised. For such an iconic song, Reelin' In The Years is a curious confection when you get up close. It opens with a 30-second guitar solo, the verse lyric is overcrowded, almost rap-like in its tumbling flow (producer Gary Katz rated Fagen's ability to make it sound easy: "I would dare anyone to sing a verse of Reelin' In The Years"), the double chorus is laid over an unusual chord sequence (Bm, D, A/C#, Bm, Em7, Eb dim, Dm, A/C#), its second half decorated with strikingly prominent guitar harmonies. After the second chorus section there's another display of guitar fireworks. Another full verse and chorus follow and then yet more soloing with a bluesy improvisation going into the fade out. It all amounts to a flamboyant demonstration of chops, almost vulgar in comparison to future Steely Dan recordings. There's a breathlessness and urgency uncommon in their catalogue (Bodhisattva is perhaps its nearest equivalent). They come ripping out of the traps and pelt the entire length of the track.

Getting that opening solo right foxed the band's second guitarist, Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter, but it was nailed by visiting New York buddy Elliott Randall, whom Baxter had invited to Village Recorders in LA to 'say hi to the guys' then offered a chance to try something over the intro. Randall plugged his 1963 Fender Stratocaster into an Ampeg SVT bass amp (not his chosen set-up, but it worked) and pealed out a stinging solo – using the chorus melody as his starting point – which everybody instantly loved. Unfortunately, the engineer hadn't recorded it. So Randall did it again. That second take is the one you hear, subsequently nominated by Jimmy Page as his all-time favourite guitar solo, marking it "12 out of 10".

A YEAR OR SO LATER, BECKER AND FAGEN TOLD New York broadcaster Alison Steele – whose show on WNEW, The Nightbird, may have been a key inspiration for Fagen's *The Nightfly* – that this song started as a recorded jam, its lyric conjured later. Which may be why the words feel jammed in. But that pushiness is relevant. In a 1974 article for Creem, writer Wayne Robins mentioned that he'd known Becker and

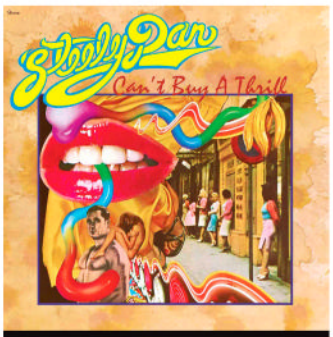
Cue the music: Steely Dan (from left) Jim Hodder, David Palmer, Denny Dias, Jeff 'Skunk' Baxter, Donald Fagen and Walter Becker reel it in, 1972.

Getty

BETWEEN COOL AND ABANDONMENT"

Fagen to nod to at Bard College, the upstate New York school they'd all attended. He judged Reelin' In The Years "the best song ever written about the pseudo-poetic, preppie-hippy assholism that dominated Bard and other joints of its kind". The lyric sees its narrator being baffled by his college girlfriend dumping him: "After all the things we've done and seen you find another man/The things you think are useless I can't understand." Don and Walter understood deluded hipsters.

Fagen's youth occurred when pop was all Pat Boone and Tab Hunter, white-bread chart-fodder that held no appeal for him, so his musical cravings were satiated by jazz radio and he didn't graduate to pop until things like Dylan's It's All Over Now, Baby Blue and the Lovin' Spoonful's Do You Believe In Magic caught his ear. Becker made a similar downstream journey via the blues. Their pop epiphanies coincided with their years at Bard, so as everyone else was just getting pretentious at college, Don and Walter were emerging from their beatnik phase and starting to loosen up. A process that effectively became the recipe for Steely Dan – finding the sweet spot between cool and abandonment: "We can and should do anything, but it has to be *right*." Pursuing that rightness saw them becoming more rarified and subtle over time, but on Reelin' In The Years they just lay it all out there.



"IT SET A TONE FOR THE SOUNDS FILLING FM AIRWAVES, LUXURY POP WITH AN AWARENESS OF JAZZ."

Some commentators have credited the song with kick-starting a new kind of musicality in American rock, as if it gave a new generation of players permission to blow. That may be overstating its impact, but it certainly set a tone for the sounds that started filling FM airwaves, luxury pop with an awareness of jazz – Joni Mitchell's *Court & Spark*, Weather Report and so on – blowing a grittier East Coast current into the sound of the West Coast. Lyricism striped with cynicism.

In subsequent interviews, Becker and Fagen were sniffy about their early work, calling their first releases at best "immature", at worst "humiliating". The best compliment Fagen could muster for this song was "dumb but effective". Becker went further, saying, "It's no fun." But they softened, Becker eventually noting to Musician magazine in 1982 that "Do It Again is a fucking good record. Reelin' In The Years is a good record." "I'd agree with that," said Fagen.

It was as self-congratulatory as they ever got. Ⓜ

"I could be just as funky as the funkiest dude in the neighbourhood": Marvin Gaye prepares to kick ass with his silver boots, Golden West Studios, LA, 1973; (below) Gaye's "horny" thirteenth album, *Let's Get It On*.

MARVIN GAYE SAYS, LET'S GET IT ON

In 1973 the conflicted Prince of Soul was enjoying a new $1 million Motown deal. He was also battling writer's block and had a separation from the boss's sister to navigate. The moment brought forth a charged song cycle which reconciled his prodigious spiritual and erotic drives into an ecstatic whole. Then its success meant he had to tour it. "Some part of him thought he was a fraud," recall collaborators and friends, "but he made it look easy."

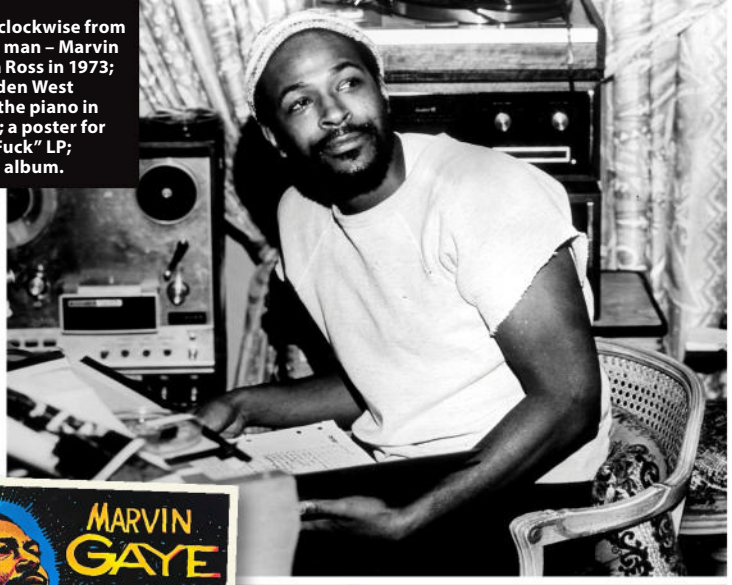
Interviews by **LOIS WILSON** • Portrait by **JIM BRITT**

Don Peake: By 1973, Motown had completed their move from Detroit to Los Angeles and they had a studio on Romaine Street. LA was a small music community, everyone knew everyone.

David Ritz: Marvin was reluctant to make the move. He didn't really want to go to LA, but he was competitive. The Jackson 5 were having big hits and he wanted to make his LA statement, make a grand single and album and prove he could make it there.

Ed Townsend: I was shopping songs around I had written in New York. I heard Marvin had been asking about me, I think he liked how I had worked with Nelson Riddle, and I went to Marvin's apartment on Cattaraugus ➢

Jim Britt/Getty



Playing it cool: (clockwise from left) untroubled man – Marvin Gaye with Diana Ross in 1973; all smiles in Golden West Studios, '73; on the piano in the studio, 1974; a poster for Marvin's "Let's Fuck" LP; singles from the album.

"IT WAS LIKE BEATLEMANIA – THEY SHRIEKED!"

ERNIE WATTS

[Avenue] with Let's Get It On, Please Stay (Once You Go Away), If I Should Die Tonight and Keep Gettin' It On – so, what became side one of *Let's Get It On*. He hadn't had a hit for a while and Motown were keen to get him back in the studio and recording. I played the songs to him on the piano and he said he'd record them if I would produce him. I said I would if he called up Berry Gordy and told him, so he called him up straight away and told him. I got the job.

DP: I got the call to go to the studio [Hitsville West, Los Angeles] and I walked in and [arranger] René Hall was there and [producer] Ed Townsend was there and Marvin Gaye was there. Then there was the band: drummer Paul Humphrey, pianist Joe Sample, bassist Wilton Felder… I was handed a sheet with all the chord changes on and we started rehearsing. We did three songs in three hours – the first song we did was If I Should Die Tonight and the second was Let's Get It On.

ET: I wrote Let's Get It On in alcohol rehabilitation. It was about getting on with life and living it. Marvin listened to it, connected with it, and sang his butt off on it, and gave it this whole other sexual meaning.

DR: He felt the pressure to follow up [1971 conceptual triumph] *What's Going On*. It was this huge social statement, and he wanted to do an openly sexual album, one that would be *unapologetically* sexual. Meeting Jan [Hunter, future wife] while making the album had a huge impact. Her being a teenager, him being an older man, she emboldened him.

ET: Jan was the daughter of Barbara Hunter, who was a friend of mine [her father was jazz singer and hipster Slim Gaillard]. They came to the studio to see Marvin record and Marvin fell for her and she for him. They started dating.

Marvin Gaye: I write my music according to my lifestyle. If I'm sad, I write sad music; if I'm being divorced, I write divorced albums. If I'm sexy, if I feel hot, or horny – I'll write a horny album.

Ernie Watts: It was a controversial subject matter for sure, but Motown were behind whatever Marvin wanted to do at this time. He had had *What's Going On* and he was like Miles Davis, whatever he did everyone wanted to know about it, because it was Marvin Gaye.

DP: We start doing Let's Get It On, the song. Then René Hall stops the rehearsal and says the song needs something extra, and turns to me and says, "Don, just make up something at the beginning can you?" I had just bought a wah wah pedal and I went, OK, here we go, and I go wah wah-wah wah, and that's the intro, straight off, no overdubs. I'd played on The Righteous Brothers' You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling and knew that was going to be a hit. I'd played on Ike & Tina Turner's River Deep – Mountain High and knew that was going to be a hit, and while I was playing on Let's Get It On, I knew that was going to be a hit too. It was really special.

EW: The way they worked at Motown at this time was that they'd record in layers, they'd record the rhythm section first, the keys, drums, bass, guitar and percussion parts, and then Marvin would do his vocal parts and then we'd do the horn section parts. Marvin had a studio on Sunset [Boulevard] where he'd work on his vocals. He was a nocturnal guy and he'd call me in the evenings to come by and we would trade lines and work on melodies. The main thing about Marvin is that he was very, very serious about his music and he was very involved with the spiritual aspect of music, the self-improvement, healing side, and we would talk about those things in-between working.

DR: He was a mystic, he was channelling something. Yes, Let's Get It On was, "Let's Fuck", but there was also a spiritual element. That sentence in the song, "we're all sensitive people, with so much to give," it was also about, "Let's get our hearts and souls together." And then if you look at the other tracks on the album, there's Distant Lover, which was this anguished, fall-on-your-knees soul ballad, and then If I Should Die Tonight, where he's contemplating his own death. It ends with Just To Keep You Satisfied, which is him announcing he's leaving Anna [Gordy, wife] and the whole anguish of a ruined marriage. So, it's a celebration of sensuality, but it's a whole lot more. There's vulnerability and contradiction.

Jim Britt: The sleeve image was important. [Motown Creative Assistant] Suzanne de Passe told me Marvin had a new album and I was to go to the studio and shoot the cover for it. I'd already done the sleeve artwork for [1972's] *Trouble Man*

Getty (4)

Marvellous Marvin: Gaye gets it on for US TV show Soul Train, February 16, 1974.

and [1973's] *Diana & Marvin* duets album in one joint session with Diana [Ross] and Marvin. He was there in his red beanie cap and denim shirt, just his normal everyday clothes, and I spent the whole day shooting him, but I knew the sharp blur shot was the one, and I made a print of it to show Marvin. He was with Norman Whitfield, who goes, "That's the cover," and Marvin goes, "OK, that's the cover." Years later, Spike Lee bought the print off me for $15K.

ET: Marvin was a perfectionist and a genius. No doubt about that. He was a complicated man and he had a reputation for being difficult to work with, but that wasn't my experience. He really worked hard in the studio. He arrived on time and he was focused, he was a good listener. He took things on board.

JB: Later Berry Gordy came by to have a look at the sleeve. I had a press proof of the cover and inner gatefold laid out. He was an aggressive kind of guy – I'm six foot two, skinny – and he kind of bumped me out the way and he goes, "What's this?" And I said, It's the cover. Marvin likes it. He was looking at two photos in the gatefold and he said, "It looks like he's been smoking dope in these," and I told him he had been, and we switched those two photos out.

ET: When we finished the recordings, I gave the tapes to Motown and I told them to call me when the album got to Number 1. I was that confident, and it was selling so well Marvin called me after a couple of weeks and said, "You gave me a monster." He was elated.

Getty (7)

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

● Marvin Gaye (singer)

● Don Peake (guitarist)

● Ed Townsend (producer/ songwriter)

● David Ritz (friend/ biographer)

● Ernie Watts (saxophone)

● David T Walker (guitarist)

● Jim Britt (sleeve photographer)

DR: The single was Number 1 [in September 1973] and was Motown's biggest selling single, bigger than Stop! In The Name Of Love and Reach Out I'll Be There; the album then went to Number 1. He had this *huge* success, but the downside for him was Motown wanted him to tour and he was reluctant to do it. He didn't think he could sing, he had a complex about it. Some part of him thought he was a fraud, which was crazy. In the studio he was happy because you can edit, you can punch in and punch out, and you can work there all night and all day and there's not an audience judging you. He couldn't shake his fear of being exposed.

MG: Sometimes I'd throw up before getting out there – that's how scared I was.

EW: The first show was at Oakland Coliseum [on January 4, 1974] and it was being recorded live for an album [1974's *Live!*]. It was an orchestra-sized band. We were organised, we had rehearsed beforehand, we knew exactly where we had to be at what time and what we were doing. Marvin had performance anxiety, but most performers of Marvin's size had nerves before a performance. It was all part of it.

David T Walker: Gene Page conducted and Marvin was shy backstage, he was quiet, but the moment he got out on the stage, he made it look easy. He led and we followed. It was pure joy on that stage, everyone connecting and buzzing off one another.

EW: The Coliseum was packed out and it was like Beatlemania. Before he went on stage they were shrieking, before he did anything on-stage, they were shrieking, and then for two hours solid – they shrieked! It didn't matter if he was singing or introducing a tune, they were screaming. It was like that at all the shows I played with him from then on.

MG: Everyone was talking about new funk groups like the Commodores, Earth, Wind & Fire and Kool & The Gang. Well, Kool was cool, but I could be just as funky as the funkiest dude in the neighbourhood. Man, I was ready to kick ass.

JB: I was there to take the *Live!* album cover shot. I didn't plan it, I worked with the emotion he was conveying from the stage. He looked great with the jeans outfit, the studs, the cap and the big boots, and the double exposure captured that emotion and energy he was creating.

EW: He knew he was an important figure in pop and R&B, he knew he had power and influence and he wanted to use it to make a difference, to make this a more beautiful world. *Let's Get It On* and the live shows that followed were his way of making the world a more beautiful place.

DR: The *Live!* album was successful [it reached US Number 8 in September '74] and it's very much Marvin's honeymoon period. He's found a new love, he's found a great groove, he's a happy guy and he's having hits and it's, 'Welcome to LA', and this new life he's got there. But Marvin being Marvin, it would not take him long to undercut it all. Sex, love, drugs and money, or lack of it, would be his undoing.

Thanks to David Ritz, Harry Weinger and Adam White. Ed Townsend interview from 2001. Marvin Gaye quotes courtesy Tom Joyner (1984) and David Ritz (1979).

WHAT THE WORLD

A third act for LIAM GALLAGHER is a third coming for JOHN SQUIRE, The Stone Roses' guitar genius who thought he might never play guitar again. Together, they're the band fans of UK indie's golden age could have wished into being. All it took was two Knebworths, some shoes and "loads of guitars". "It's the best bits of Oasis with the best bits of The Stone Roses," they promise TED KESSLER.

Photography by TOM OLDHAM.

Tom Oldham (lighting by James Hole and Bradley Polkinghorne with post production by Milk and Metal)

IS WAITING FOR

The people we used to be: likely lads Liam Gallagher and John Squire return, Spring Studios, London, December 12, 2023.

AS WITH MANY GREAT MUSICAL PARTNERSHIPS, IT BEGAN WITH an appreciation of each other's shoes.

"Footwear," says John Squire of his new collaboration with Liam Gallagher, "brought us together."

After Squire stepped out at Gallagher's enormous Knebworth shows in June 2022 to play on an encore of Oasis's Champagne Supernova, Liam thanked the reclusive ex-Stone Roses guitarist with two pairs of box-fresh moccasins he thought Squire might like. Liam knew shoes were the route to Squire's heart.

"Hand-made from Portugal, with tassels," says Gallagher, with a connoisseur's reverence. "Bit mad-looking, but beautiful."

The mutual interest harks back to the very first time the pair met. It was early 1994. Oasis were in Monnow Valley studio in Wales, on the border with England, recording debut album *Definitely Maybe*, while Squire was down the road in Rockfield, two years into redefining the term 'difficult second album' with The Stone Roses' *Second Coming*. They bumped into each other in the nearby town of Monmouth. What, wondered Gallagher by way of introduction, did Squire have on his feet on the back cover of the first Stone Roses album?

"Every time I've run into him since," says Squire, "he's had some question about my shoes."

"I remember watching the video for the Roses' Fools Gold and thinking, Squire's got Vans on! The black slip-ons," continues Gallagher, with great enthusiasm. "That was a big moment. Get a pair of Vans, then."

On his way home to Macclesfield from rehearsals for the Knebworth performance in 2022, Squire sent Gallagher a message in a similar vein. What shoes had Liam been wearing that afternoon? "Clarks Caravans," recalls Gallagher. "Beauties."

That's when Liam decided he'd gift the two pairs of moccasins to Squire. John Squire, meanwhile, had a couple of presents for Liam Gallagher too.

"He said, 'I've got two songs I've been writing, would you like to sing on them?'" recalls Gallagher. "Of course. John's songs are the reason I got into music in the first place."

Gallagher had one stipulation, however. "I needed guitars back in my life. There'd been a lack of them on…"

He grasps for the title of his most recent solo album. MOJO lends a hand: *C'mon You Know?*

"…that's the one. I told him I'd only do it as long as there's loads of guitars on the songs."

"Luckily, loads of guitars is my middle name," chuckles Squire, with a self-deprecating shrug. "So…"

Thereby hangs our tale.

IT BEGINS IN 1988, AT MANCHESTER'S International 2, where 16-year-old Liam Gallagher is watching The Stone Roses, recognising something of himself in a contemporary pop group for the first time. "Most bands looked like fannies," he recalls. "The Roses were cool as. I thought, Yeah. I'll have a bit of that."

Elsewhere in the audience that night, his older brother Noel was having a similar revelation. He'd first watched The Stone Roses in the same venue a year or so before, when the group were emerging from a gothic period, singer Ian Brown performing in "a harlequin shirt, with a walking stick and slicked back hair, like Dracula".

The metamorphosis into the quartet who strode on stage that night in loose-fitting streetwear was stark, Brown having swapped his cane for a large silver bell which he sounded to signal the start of the show – the insouciant singer's only interaction with the audience: a take-it-or-leave-us attitude noted approvingly by Liam. But it was the music that rang loudest for the Gallaghers.

"The songs sounded so simple," said the elder brother, describing the aspirational longing of I Wanna Be Adored, which opened the set. "I thought, Well, if they can do it, I can definitely do it." Later, Noel would tell John Squire that Oasis owed their entire existence to The Stone Roses. "Without The Stone Roses, Liam wouldn't have bothered to join Bonehead's band," he said, "and I wouldn't have subsequently joined Liam's band." In truth, the Gallagher brothers had fallen under the same spell blanketing the UK's youth between the summers of 1988 and 1990.

Few successful bands' reputations have been founded on a solitary album quite as profoundly as The Stone Roses and their eponymous 1989 debut. Revelling in a free-spirited attitude absorbed from 1988's acid house movement, and containing '60s-styled songs of freedom elevated into life-affirming terrace-chants, *The Stone Roses* reverberated with a more refined sound than was typical of alternative rock bands of the era.

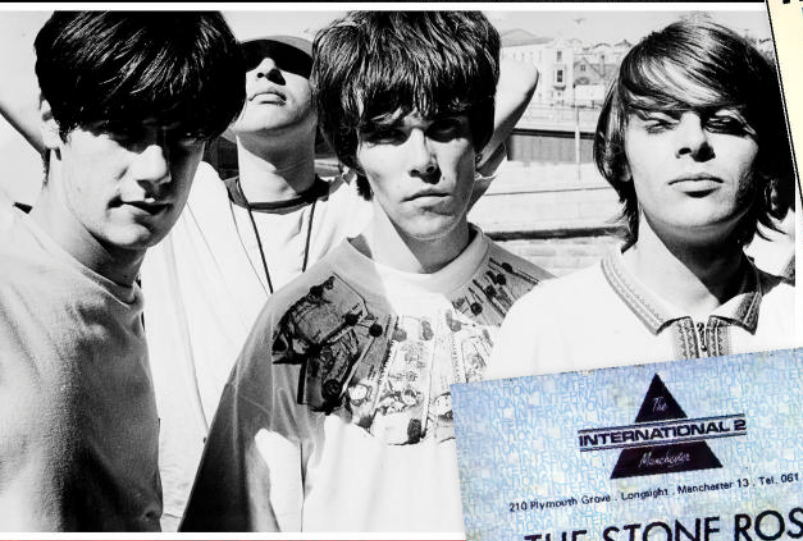
That was largely due to the band's musicianship, particularly the expansive playing of Squire and drummer Alan 'Reni' Wren, whose off-the-beat style helped to trigger an avalanche of indie-dance records, and influence the gaggle of (not wholly, but notably) Northwestern bands that flourished in the Roses' wake. These included Inspiral Carpets, for whom a certain Noel Gallagher was a roadie. To his dismay he was once disciplined for wearing a Stone Roses T-shirt side of stage by his insecure employers.

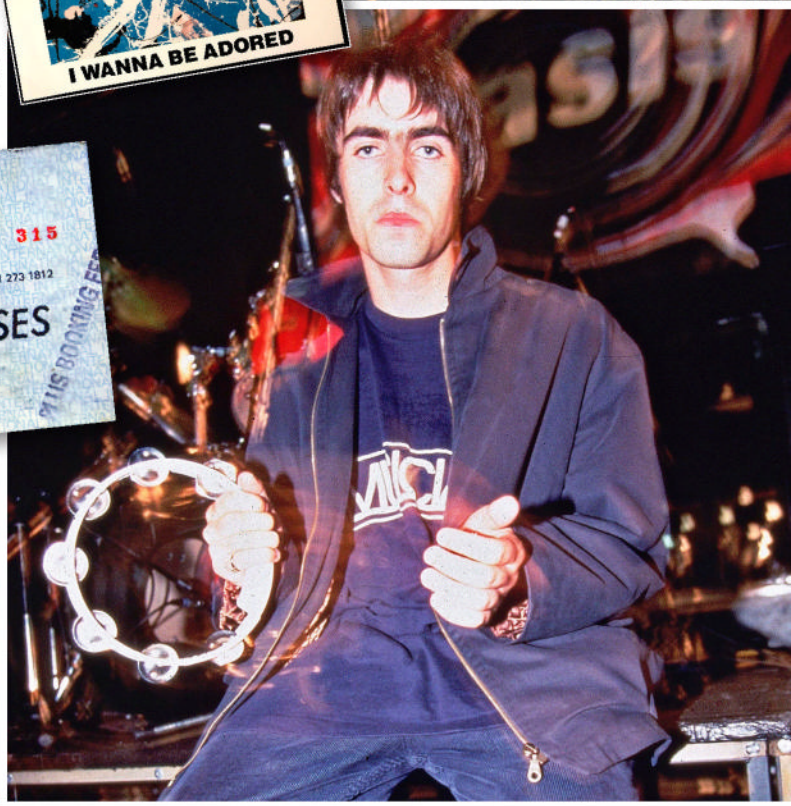
But it was Squire who seemed the real anomaly of the age. Here was an elegant, adventurous guitarist not in thrall to the jangle of Johnny Marr or The Velvet Underground's feedback; unlike his peers, he was harking back to the more flashily fluid styles of Jimi Hendrix and Jimmy Page. "He's always been the guitarist I most admired," admitted Noel at the height of Oasis in the '90s.

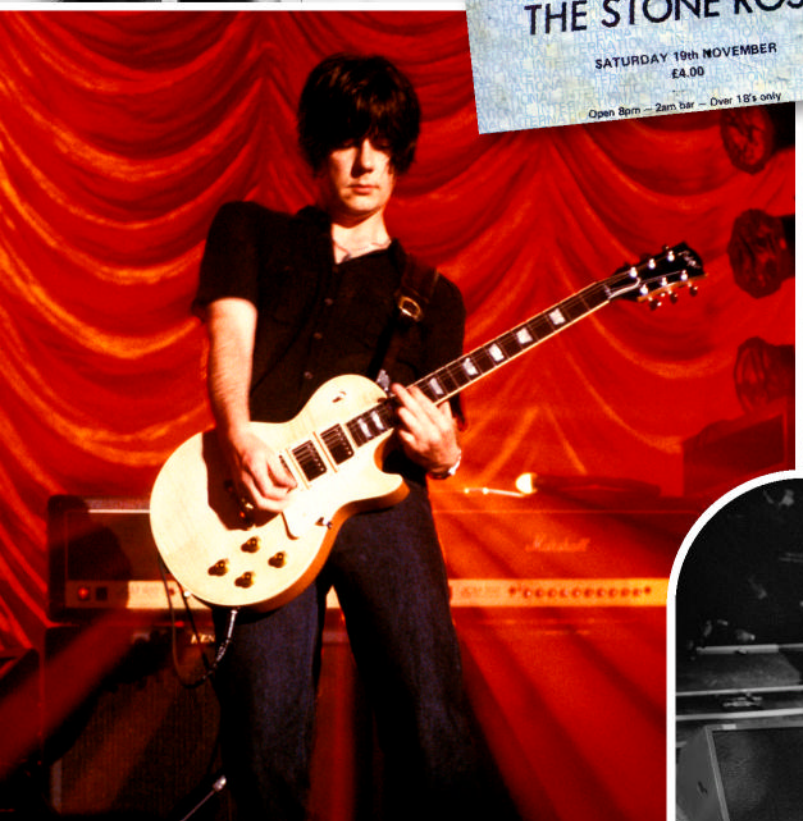
The Stone Roses' influence upon Oasis, however, was apparent in more than just the music. Squire, Brown, Wren and bassist Gary 'Mani' Mounfield provided iconic photos and electrifying copy; they talked of world domination, but in the most sullen, least accommodating manner ➢

"MOST BANDS LOOKED LIKE FANNIES. THE ROSES WERE COOL AS. I THOUGHT, YEAH. I'LL HAVE A BIT OF THAT." LIAM GALLAGHER

Charlie Lightening, Jill Furmanovsky, Getty (4)







Days of wine and roses: (clockwise from top left) Liam Gallagher at Knebworth Park, June 3, 2022 with (third right) John Squire; The Stone Roses, March 15, 1985 (clockwise from top left) Alan 'Reni' Wren, Andy Couzens, Tony Garner, John Squire, Ian Brown; Gallagher with Oasis, London Astoria, August 18, 1994; Squire joins Oasis for Champagne Supernova, Knebworth Park, August 11, 1996; Squire with The Seahorses, 1997; the classic Stone Roses line-up, July 1989 (from left) Squire, Reni, Brown, Gary 'Mani' Mounfield; (left) The Stone Roses' 1989 eponymous debut; a pair of Clarks Caravans –"beauties", according to Liam.

STONE CLASSIC!

Thirty-five years on, producer JOHN LECKIE relives the Roses' epochal debut LP, and John Squire's pivotal part in it.

BEFORE THE ROSES, I'd produced The Woodentops, The La's, and XTC as The Dukes Of Stratosphear… To be honest, my motivation was, The Woodentops hadn't made it yet, nor The La's, so it better be the Roses! [Rough Trade boss] Geoff Travis had sent me their original demos, but by the time I replied, they'd signed to Zomba. Ian Brown mentioned the Dukes' album? One thing I didn't realise for years is that Made Of Stone's vocal melody is the same as the Dukes' 25 O'Clock, I think Ian nicked it. Maybe that's why they chose me, but I think it was because Geoff suggested me.

My first impression of the demos was, "Oh, another indie band." It was badly recorded, everything was too fast and the vocals were over-drenched in reverb. I knew it would be a challenge. I had to rehearse them and rearrange songs, giving them intros and outros, and steady tempos. For I Am The Resurrection, they wanted to jam the second half, all feedback and noise like they did on-stage. I said, That's boring on record; do something melodic that people will remember.

John could be critical, less making suggestions and more, "Why can't that bit sound as good as that bit?" He wanted to explore different amps and guitars, but he made most of the first album with a Stratocaster, a Fender Twin Reverb amp and JBL speakers. He was always quiet, and when he did speak, it was usually profound. He'd set up his 16-track Fostex recorder in a little space in the studio, or his bedroom at Rockfield, and spend days in there, working out parts.

Mani was always great. I don't remember difficulties recording Ian. Reni was a fantastic drummer, and a great harmoniser, but he wanted to sing on everything! Ian would say, "Can we turn Reni down?" Ian thought the harmonies sounded too '60s.

I get so engrossed in recording that I never project in terms of an audience or the impact a record will make; you just want to make something that you'd listen to at home. We always knew I Wanna Be Adored would start and I Am The Resurrection would end it, but once we had the whole running order we realised, "Fuck, that's good." Of course, John and Ian hated the record. They said the drums and bass weren't loud enough, and the guitar needed to be more devastating: they'd been playing Public Enemy in the studio all the time, full blast.

AFTER THE ALBUM became successful, Zomba said, "Do whatever you want." Ian and John had the Fools Gold demo with the breakbeat loop from Funky Drummer and we spent three weeks at Sawmills in Cornwall recording it and What The World Is Waiting For. It took four days alone just doing the wah wah guitar. There was no Pro Tools then to do it for you, but limitations made you try harder. Thirty-five years on, my grandchildren listen to *The Stone Roses*. Not because of me, but their friends at school. "That record with the funny colour and splashes of paint, you did that didn't you? Got any vinyl, any T-shirts?"

"THEY SAID THE DRUMS AND BASS WEREN'T LOUD ENOUGH."

I knew the second album was a problem when they didn't show up. Reni would go home for days, or John wouldn't come out of his room. Or they'd endlessly play the same thing over and over. There was no A&R man around, no manager by then, it was just me and them. I told [A&R] Gary Gersh, We've been here three weeks, and they've done nothing. He said, "No problem, just let them be creative, don't worry about the budget." The studio cost £800 a day – and the programmer hired to do loops for £400 a day was just sitting there. They had the best drummer in the world, and they wanted to use drum machines! It was a nightmare. I left after three months and they finished *Second Coming* 14 months later.

When I worked with him, John was a great writer, a good arranger and between a good and a great guitarist. He was still 'indie'; not like he is now, playing stadiums. By the second record, he was into the whole Jimmy Page, Led Zeppelin thing, but he'd never been to America, and that would have made a big difference. I was always disappointed that the Roses never expanded their horizons.

The thing with Liam? Just Another Rainbow doesn't make me wiggle my hips. But Liam's vocal is fantastic, and I really want to hear what the rest of their album is like.

As told to Martin Aston

This is the one: (left) John Leckie, producer of *The Stone Roses*, 2003; (below) in perfect harmony – the Roses in 1989; (bottom) John Squire meets guitar hero Jimmy Page, 2014.

Tom Sheehan, Getty (2)

Island life: (clockwise) The Stone Roses on-stage at Spike Island, May 27, 1990; Bonehead (bottom left) plus van and crew get splattered at Spike Island; John Squire on-stage at Wembley Stadium during the last Roses reunion tour, June 17, 2017.

"THE DOCTORS SAID I MIGHT NEVER GET FULL MOBILITY BACK IN MY THUMB. I STARTED GETTING PARANOID, CONVINCING MYSELF I'D NEVER PLAY AGAIN." JOHN SQUIRE

imaginable; and they recognised the value of a 'happening'.

When the Roses headlined their huge outdoor gathering of 30,000 fans at Spike Island, near Widnes, in May 1990, several future members of Oasis made the pilgrimage, including Noel and bassist Paul 'Guigsy' McGuigan. Local press captured images of a van parked at the top of the site redecorated in the style of John Squire's paint-splattered sleeve design for *The Stone Roses*, surrounded by its lairy-looking passengers and owner: future Oasis guitarist Paul 'Bonehead' Arthurs.

When Oasis headlined Knebworth in 1996 in front of 250,000 fans, they made sure to pay tribute to their primary influence, inviting Squire to guest on Champagne Supernova. "I had the hang of playing in front of that many by the time Liam got me on again 26 years later," says Squire today. "Though I was slightly thrown walking on after he introduced me as 'the coolest man on the planet'."

The Stone Roses made one great album, and one disappointing follow-up – but they didn't record nearly enough music given the demand for it. They set a blueprint for an attitude-drenched, '60s-influenced Mancunian group, but left the mission unfinished. Oasis completed the job. As Noel Gallagher said: "The Stone Roses kicked the door open for us, then we came in and nailed it to the wall."

Ironically, the most technically limited member, singer Ian Brown, went on to have the most prolific post-Roses career, releasing seven solo albums before a descent into online conspiracy talk appeared to permanently queer his commercial pitch. Mani had a good run playing in Primal Scream, amongst others.

But neither Reni nor Squire made much music, with just one 1997 album by Squire's post-Roses band The Seahorses, and two Squire solo records, *Time Changes Everything* (2002) and *Marshall's House* (2004).

"I think there should be a lot more music by John Squire out in the world," declares Liam Gallagher, reasonably.

AFTER KNEBWORTH MK 2, LIAM GALLAGHER AND John Squire set about righting that balance. At first, they swapped photos and video clips – a mood board for a potential album. Squire had riffs and melodies, but he wanted to make sure they were going to be moulded to each other's satisfaction.

"You'd sent me Bob Marley, the Sex Pistols," he reminds Gallagher, sitting on a sofa in central London's plush RAK Studios. "I'd sent you something by the Faces, a clip of Hendrix. What's that Humble Pie track? Is it 40 Days In The Hole – 30, is it? Anyway, sent him that."

Squire followed up with two demos he'd recorded on an acoustic guitar, along with the lyrics and a guide vocal. "I've noticed on this record that writing on an acoustic is the way forward," he says. "There's something about having that big box vibrating against your chest that helps with my singing – plus, lashings of Auto-Tune."

Gallagher took those demos into the vocal booth he's built in his Highgate home and blew new life into them. "I had a hunch we'd sound good together," says Squire, "but Liam singing the songs took them somewhere else."

Along with his vocals, Gallagher sent Squire another favourite tune: the Bee Gees' 1970 hit, Lonely Days.

"One of the songs I'd sent him had this chorus which was too high for me. I had to do it Pinky and Perky-style as a falsetto," admits Squire. "When he sent it back with the Bee Gees I thought, Shit, I've only just started working with Liam and he's already taking the piss."

After another rally of e-mailed song sketches, Gallagher travelled up to Squire's home outside Macclesfield to record a full set of demos. As is perhaps typical of his solo career so far, Gallagher was in a determined frame of mind.

"I remember you coming in saying, 'I'm going to record two songs a day,'" says Squire to him. "And I thought, Oh aye?"

"You were, like, 'Steady on!'" laughs Gallagher. "'Steady fucking on!'"

Camera Press (2), Getty

"I HAD MY MIND BLOWN!"

The seismic impact of Squire and the Roses on the '90s UK indie scene, by Ride's ANDY BELL.

I WAS IN Oxford at art school on a foundation course in early '89 when I first heard The Stone Roses and John Squire. Ride had had their first rehearsal at the end of '88 and I bought Made Of Stone – I preferred the B-side, Going Down – but then I got the album and saw them live at Oxford Polytechnic and had my mind blown.

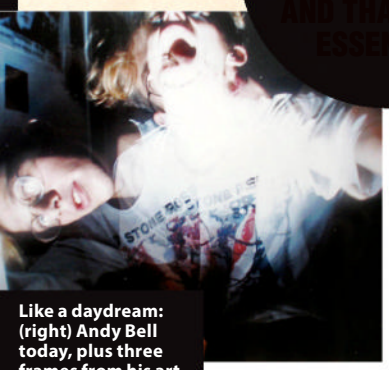
I took my camera to do a photography project, spent the whole day there, went to the soundcheck, had a chance encounter with Ian Brown in the bar while John and Reni were playing. At that point, my biggest influence had been Johnny Marr. I had been a teenage Smiths fan and his style had really informed my playing – but John Squire felt like a stage *on*. It was the fluidity with which he played. It had elements of Johnny Marr's playing and also George Harrison's playing and there were so many melodic hooks going on but it felt *liquid* – very Hendrix-y. It took from the blues tradition but without being clichéd. And it was so warm.

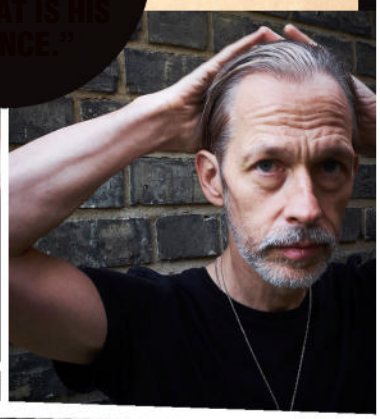
In a similar way to Johnny Marr's influence on me, John's playing basically became a part of my own style; I am just an amalgamation of what I liked about Johnny Marr and John Squire! And it wasn't just John Squire's playing in The Stone Roses. I love the riff on The Seahorses' Love Me And Leave Me; when I was in Hurricane #1, we were on the same TV show and I was able to check out the amps and the big Leslie speaker because that's a big part of John's sound, that rotary speaker sound.

His influence is huge. The solo on Oasis's Live Forever is very John Squire, the way it goes back and forth over the melody. It's almost like John Squire's melodies fold over each other, and that is his essence. I can hear all that in what he's done with Liam on Just Another Rainbow. I was so blown away by it and it's an amalgamation of both of their talents and John as a lyricist. There is something so bold about the lyrics. They are very original, so primal, so instinctive… and then the second half of the song is just a load of guitar playing, which you don't hear any more. It's a really good thing.

As told to Lois Wilson

"AND THAT IS HIS ESSENCE."





Like a daydream: (right) Andy Bell today, plus three frames from his art school photography project shot at The Stone Roses' Oxford Poly-technic gig on May 24, 1989.

Squire has to admit, however, that Gallagher was as good as his word. "He came in and totally nailed them. I've never heard someone be able to do that with such natural delivery, each time."

Gallagher reckons that some of his demo vocals were so good they made it onto the final album… but Squire lets him down gently: "I think we binned them all."

Instead, they booked two weeks in Los Angeles with producer Greg Kurstin, who's worked on Gallagher's three hit solo albums on the production and songwriting team. Kurstin offered to play bass and hired well-travelled Californian drummer Joey Waronker to complete the quartet. Initially, Squire was wary. "I'm thinking, Why am I writing these songs to just let these LA nutters play on it? Because it's three weeks, by the time you realise it's shit, it's all over."

In the end, the quartet laid down the basic tracks in four days, spending the rest of the time on overdubs. For Squire, who'd spent over two years on *Second Coming*, recording at Liam pace was a refreshing novelty. "I sense John is a perfectionist," Kurstin tells MOJO. "He puts care into his parts: I love that. But he didn't have time to be overly obsessive, so it's very loose and flowing."

"And a fortnight later we came out with a masterpiece," exclaims Gallagher. "The best bits of Oasis with the best bits of The Stone Roses."

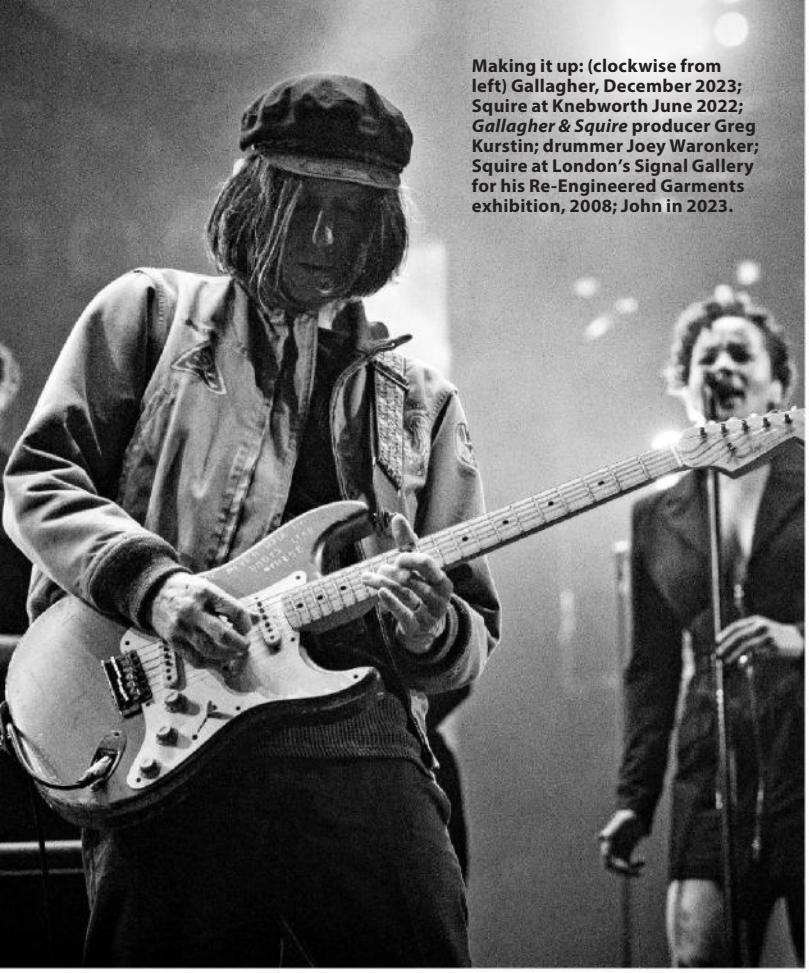
He slaps his hands together, keen to get moving again. The only time Liam Gallagher enjoys staying still is when he's performing on-stage in front of a large number of people.

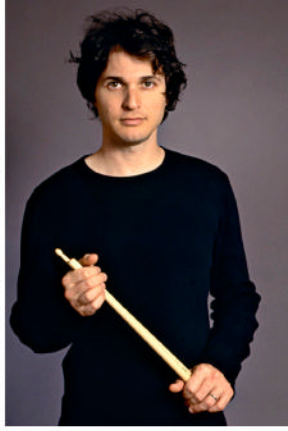
"Right! That's covered everything, hasn't it?"

GALLAGHER AND SQUIRE ARE IN RAK TO WORK with pedal-steel player Joe Harvey-Whyte on an acoustic version of Mother Nature's Song, the heart-tugging, Big Star-like ballad that closes their self-titled album. Neither is entirely sure why.

"Don't ask me," says Gallagher, looking through the glass at Squire plucking plaintively away in the booth. He tugs at his jacket, which is zipped up to his chin. "They just throw the parka on me in the morning, boot me out of the house into a car and that's when I find what I'm up to."

Tom Oldham (2), Courtesy of Andy Bell (3), Sonic Cathedral





Making it up: (clockwise from left) Gallagher, December 2023; Squire at Knebworth June 2022; *Gallagher & Squire* producer Greg Kurstin; drummer Joey Waronker; Squire at London's Signal Gallery for his Re-Engineered Garments exhibition, 2008; John in 2023.

"JOHN IS A PERFECTIONIST. I LOVE THAT. BUT HE DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO BE OVERLY OBSESSIVE, SO IT'S VERY LOOSE AND FLOWING." GREG KURSTIN

What was in theory meant to be a quick in-and-out operation from noon until a late lunchtime has become labour-intensive. Neither Gallagher nor especially Squire are bash-it-out artists in the studio, taking great care today to make sure they're perfectly happy with the recording. This is understandable: since *Marshall's House*, Squire has only released two pieces of music, both one-off singles with The Stone Roses, both in 2016. Since then he has concentrated on painting, culminating in a 2019 exhibition, entitled Disinformation, at Damien Hirst's south London gallery. Returning to music now, aged 61, Squire is going to make sure every note he releases is just how he wants it.

By 4pm they have played Mother Nature's Song perfectly a dozen times, with tweaks only perceptible to dogs. We have reached the fabled 'more cowbell' stage as Gallagher roots inside a large sack of percussive instruments looking for a shaker, having decided the trio's handclaps don't add anything. "Everyone loves a shaker," he decides holding one to his ear, while doing his trademark monkey-lollop around the room.

Squire wanders back into the control booth, fairly confident that his latest acoustic contribution is "nearly there". He turns to Gallagher.

"Liam," he wonders, "do you know why we're doing this?"

"Not a clue," comes the reply.

"Well, I'm just happy to be here," says Squire, softly.

They return to the main room for one more take. Liam puts his headphones and reading glasses back on, and leans into the microphone. Thirteen takes and two packets of Lockets into the day, his voice now its best-greased version of Lennon-meets-Lydon, a heartfelt sneer, he sings: "Listen to Mother Nature's Song/The melodies are beautiful, the chords sublime…"

He sounds fantastic. The control booth, which contains Gallagher's co-managers Sam Eldridge and Debbie Gwyther – who is also Liam's life partner – producer Adam Noble, an in-house engineer and Squire's management representative from SJM, Conrad Murray, is awestruck silence. Earlier, Eldridge had compared the potential cultural buzz of Squire and Gallagher joining forces as akin to Robert De Niro and Al Pacino teaming up for 1995 heist movie Heat. "Good film," allowed Squire.

For now, the guitarist sits in a booth opposite Gallagher while Liam howls the chorus. Earlier this year, when he heard Gallagher sing it for the first time in LA, "I welled up, and that's never happened before – something about Liam's voice does me in."

He doesn't appear to be weeping now, head bowed over his instrument, glowing in his red-checked parka, but he'd be allowed a moment's emotional pause. For nobody is more surprised, nor pleased, that John Squire is recording some of the best music of his career than John Squire himself.

IN JUNE 2016, THE STONE ROSES REUNITED after a three-year break to play 17 stadium and arena shows around the globe. Their previous Reunion Tour between May 2012 and August 2013 had been announced after a 15-year absence at a press conference in 2011 wherein the band promised not just dates, but also a new LP – their first since *Second Coming* was released in December '94. The gigs were numerous and lucrative, but the recorded goods were not forthcoming.

By the early summer of 2016, hopes were newly ➢

Charlie Lightening, Getty (3)

MAY THIS BE LOVE

How JIMI HENDRIX taught John Squire to play guitar.

JOHN SQUIRE knows the precise moment that, aged 14, he decided he wanted to play guitar. "I remember hearing a note on God Save The Queen by the Sex Pistols and thinking, I've got to try and make that sound." He begged his parents for the instrument and got one for his next birthday.

After that, he started taking guitar lessons with a music teacher on his street in Manchester who, unfortunately, only knew piano. He told Squire to bring sheet music. "All I could find was Rich Kids by the Rich Kids, Glen Matlock's band," says Squire. "The teacher must have been in his seventies, covered in dandruff. He was playing the record on the piano, but it sounded nothing like it. I quickly realised that this wasn't the route to stardom."

Squire decided to teach himself, via books and records, but struggled to keep up. Then his engineer dad Tom had an idea. "My dad modified a record player with a transformer from my train set that made the records speed up and slow down."

There was one artist that John Squire became fixated with.

"I spent hours on end listening to Jimi Hendrix playing at half the speed," he laughs, "like being on Mogadon. I didn't get anywhere near his technique, but it made me think that you can break that stuff down into more easily digestible components. It demystified it."

And that's how Jimi Hendrix taught John Squire to play guitar, in 1977, seven years after his death.

"I QUICKLY REALISED THAT THIS WASN'T THE ROUTE TO STARDOM."

Stone free: Jimi Hendrix, 1967, plus (inset) Sex Pistols' God Save The Queen, John Squire's guitar lightning bolts.

raised that the Mancunians were finally to deliver a third album with the release of the Beautiful Thing and All For One singles, two groove-based numbers which sounded like the products of jams after long tours. It proved to be a mirage.

"Both were really difficult to record," says Squire now, quietly, and one senses with understatement, "so an album would've been beyond us. That last tour was an obligation, we all knew we weren't signing up for anything more, so, in that sense, it was a satisfying ending."

Relations inside The Stone Roses, particularly between old school friends Brown and Squire, were complicated. By the band's final date at Hampden Park, on June 24, 2017, the guitarist had decided that was him done with playing music other than at home or in the local pub for fun. He'd concentrate on painting, his family. Enough monkey business.

Then two significant calamities helped change his mind. Firstly, he badly broke his thumb on the basketball court in 2021. "I couldn't play guitar or paint for ages," he says. "The doctors said I might never get full mobility back because of the nature of the bone, that it might not heal."

The demons bit deeply. "I started getting paranoid, convincing myself I'd never play again. I compounded that by building an extension for a plectrum, because my fingers were set that far apart. I glued rubber to a plectrum so I could hold it: I tried to play with my cast on, and it was terrible. That sent me into a tailspin."

Matters were not improved by intensive physio, either. "My hand was just doing nothing. I was freaking."

One physio taught him a trick with a mirror box, though. "She said, 'Get a plastic mirror and stick it on the side of a shoe box: you put your bad hand in the box so you can't see it, but instead you see a reflection of your good hand: to your brain it looks like you're doing exercises on both sides.'"

These micro movements gradually helped him heal. He started playing the guitar more regularly again, thinking of music, but without any real ambitions. "That healing process reinvigorated me. It made me want to become a better player – and maybe I've achieved that."

But then, in July of 2022, his father Tom died. It was Tom Squire's large jazz record collection that had first ignited a

Tom Oldham (2), Getty

From Manchester with love: Gallagher and Squire, December 2023; (right) Oasis in New York, July 1994 (from left) Noel Gallagher, Bonehead, Liam Gallagher, Paul 'Guigsy' McGuigan, Tony McCarroll; (below) Liam in 2023.

"LIAM IMPROVES WHAT I'M TRYING TO DO A THOUSAND-FOLD. HE BRINGS A PASSION AND INTENSITY THAT I CAN'T MUSTER." JOHN SQUIRE

childhood curiosity in music and sleeve art in his son. His passing pointed John back to that track.

"My mum's very ill now too, and that does change the way you think about your own future," he says. "I'm not going to live forever, you know?"

He told his managers that he'd like them to look into finding a female singer to work with on new music (Liam Gallagher: "Fucking hell!"), but then Knebworth happened and the stars with Gallagher aligned.

LIAM GALLAGHER AND JOHN SQUIRE are always measured against their towering early achievements. For Gallagher, it's the first two Oasis albums, *Definitely Maybe* and *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?*, along with the glorious run of singles; for Squire it's The Stone Roses' first LP and the subsequent Fools Gold single, the nine-minute last word in indie-dance. Gallagher and Squire's debut LP is unlikely to affect music culture in the same way, but it is the best thing either has recorded since those early records. It's a sleek rock album filled with unshakably sticky melodies and choruses, and enough guitars to keep even Liam Gallagher satisfied.

In it, you can hear the references they were sending each other. Hendrix looms large in Squire's playing, particularly on Love You Forever; late-'60s Stones and Beatles combine for Just Another Rainbow; the Faces are present on the acerbic Make It Up As You Go Along ("Thank you for your thoughts and prayers/And fuck you too"); Greg Kurstin loves I'm So Bored because its surliness reminds him of the Sex Pistols, while Gallagher hopes anthemic opener Raise Your Hands is a single because "it sounds like Roxy Music"… but there are two inescapable comparisons shadowing the whole set: Oasis and The Stone Roses. There are plenty of recordings by both those bands that sound less vital than the Gallagher and Squire album.

Tom Sheehan

"Sometimes people do solo things and it's not the same," admits Kurstin, "but with Liam and John, you really do feel it's a perfect marriage of their two bands."

"I think this album is up there with any of the Roses' records, any Oasis records," declares Gallagher, boldly. "I'd put it up against any of them."

Even the first recorded instance of Liam Gallagher singing the blues (on I'm A Wheel) doesn't sound incongruous. "Liam's rooted in it," insists Kurstin. "His vocal melodies in Oasis contained a lot of blues."

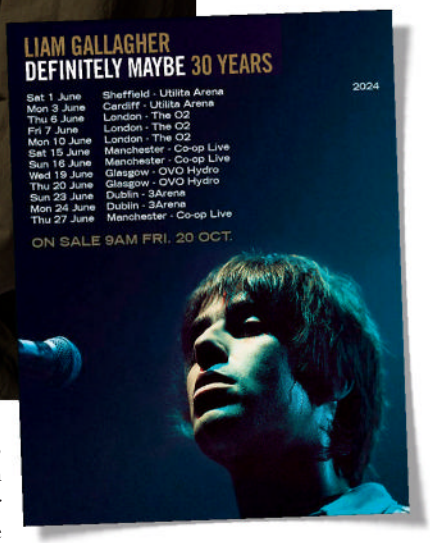
For Gallagher, it's simply that John Squire was the man for him. "I love his songs," he says. "It's criminal he's not released more."

When Squire characterises Gallagher singing his tunes, it's like a parched man describing cold water.

"Liam improves what I'm trying to do a thousand-fold. He brings a passion and intensity that I can't muster. There's something about his voice that meshes with the way that I play guitar. There doesn't seem to be a battle, it's very complementary."

They just fit.

THERE'LL BE TOURS FOR THE DUO, too, with Waronker on drums and Lewis Wharton from Little Barrie stepping in for Greg Kurstin on bass, maybe a keyboardist, with dates plotted across the globe. For Squire, the project feels like his world is being coloured in again. ➢



Future nostalgia: two's company for Squire and Gallagher; (right) Liam's 2024 *Definitely Maybe* tour itinerary.

Tom Oldham

"MY PEOPLE CALLED NOEL'S MANAGEMENT TEAM. WE PUT AN OFFER ON THE TABLE FOR AN OASIS THING – AND HE SAID NO."

LIAM GALLAGHER

"It could be really special," he says, perched on an armchair in a photo studio in Kentish Town, north London, a few days after the RAK session. "A lot of exciting things come with it: recording, travelling, gigging. Music touches you in a way that nothing else can, doesn't it?"

But Liam Gallagher also has a UK arena tour in June to honour the 30th anniversary of Oasis's *Definitely Maybe*. Will the album's author, Liam's brother Noel, join in the birthday celebrations?

"Noel? He ain't fucking doing it," scoffs Liam, stirring a latte.

Recently, Noel Gallagher suggested on Talksport Radio that all Liam had to do was call him up to see about healing the fraternal rift that's been there since Oasis split in 2009.

"And I did call him! Well, my people called Noel's management team," says Liam. "We put an offer on the table for an Oasis thing – because we got offered it – and he said no. It was a big tour, a lot of money. He turned it down. I get it, he's got a divorce going down. I'll do the *Definitely Maybe* thing and have a nice time without him."

Liam, one suspects, is now playing a longer game. There's the *(What's The Story) Morning Glory?* anniversary in 2025, after all.

"It's down to the universe. It'll happen when it happens, it's not in our hands any more," he says in a suspiciously relaxed manner. "Me, I love nostalgia though. I'm doing the lot. Every album, even… what was the last one?"

Dig Out Your Soul?

"Fucking right, man! You never enjoy them the first time round, so I'll be milking the lot. People say it's the comfort zone – I want to be in the comfort zone! Bring me my slippers and my little blankie and put me in the comfort zone, please. Life's stressful enough."

Liam Gallagher is about as upbeat as he's ever been. This he puts down partly to Buttons, the rescue dog he got from Thailand and with whom he's entirely besotted. "I miss him when I'm away for a few hours," he swoons. "He's just buzzing to be alive."

He also loves his new house in the South of France, where he spent much of the summer with his family and friends. "There's an Irish bar around the corner, a lobster shack down the road. I can sit in either with Debbie, get absolutely rat-arsed and nobody turns round and says, 'Are you that bell-end out of Oasis?' Nobody cares. I can even go to the supermarket. And the weather is nice. Marvellous."

Recent tabloid reports of doggers using the premises when he's back in the UK are untrue, however. "There are no doggers, no sex people. I went round the grounds looking."

Two further mood enhancers are his new hips. "They're all fixed," he says patting one. "Feels good to be able to move about normally again." The only subsequent discomfort he's experienced is when he came around from the operation in a hospital corridor to a stranger with a mobile phone asking for a photograph. "I'm totally spangled in my gown and he's asking for a selfie!" He is outraged. "Obviously I let him have one."

But the biggest contributor to the skip in his stride does appear to be his work with Squire.

"I was going to do the *Definitely Maybe* thing and have the rest of the year off," says Gallagher. "But John Squire has the formula for music. How could I turn these songs down?"

NEXT DOOR, JOHN SQUIRE IS ALSO thinking about the album he's recorded with Liam Gallagher. "I've been spending a lot of time with it," he says, "checking test pressings, playing it around the house, in the car – I thought I'd be over it but it has a life of its own. Are you still enjoying it?"

With every listen, finds MOJO, a new song becomes harder to dislodge from the internal speakers. Today, it's the Byrds-go-glam Mars To Liverpool.

"A toe-tapper," he agrees. "A friend of mine said, 'Don't take this the wrong way, but it reminds me of [1970s British TV sitcom] Whatever Happened To The Likely Lads? Not the melody, just the way it makes me feel.' I kinda know what they meant – it's got a sort of happy melancholic feeling, bit nostalgic…"

Melancholic nostalgia has been in the air recently. A week ago, Squire and Gallagher travelled to Manchester for Mani's wife Imelda's funeral. "Mani and his wife really doted on our girls when they were younger," remembers Squire. "I've been in touch with Mani a lot since the first time the band broke up. We used to go on holiday together, the two families. They'd always shower the girls with gifts – Mani still chucks money at them…" He shrugs. There were ghosts at the wake too. "I saw Ian at the funeral… I've seen Reni once since the last gig…"

He casts his eyes down. Decades pass as he orders his thoughts. "With Mani, it's almost a family thing. With Ian and Reni, it's just occasional…"

We fall into silence again. People start to hover around the studio, erecting lights. Eventually, he says this: "It's good to be looking forwards. I'm thinking about making the next record with Liam now. I just hope I can write one as good as this. But I'm all in."

We shake hands. He's going to have a good year.

"I think so, I hope so," he agrees. "It would be nice, wouldn't it?"

And with that John Squire and Liam Gallagher zip up their parkas, tousle their mop-tops and step beneath the spotlights for their cover photo shoot, just like in the good old glory days – which, surprisingly, may be still ahead of them.

MOJO FILTER

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MONTH'S BEST MUSIC

EDITED BY **JENNY BULLEY** jenny.bulley@bauermedia.co.uk

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"The soul-mining feels sincere; Yard Act's skill is to turn that detailed narrative into great pop music."

ANDREW PERRY ENJOYS YARD ACT PT 2. ALBUMS P89.

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A sense of wonder

Folk-art evangelist sinks into the green, green grass of home. By Jim Wirth. Illustration by Simón Prades.

Sam Lee

★★★★

songdreaming

COOKING VINYL. CD/DL/LP

"It's suffused with a belief that music might begin the process of healing the planet at a time of ecological apocalypse."

"WE DON'T have the tools with which to relate to nature any more," Sam Lee tells MOJO as he tries to explain the thought behind his Bernard Butler-produced fourth LP. "I'm a guide in that sense and music is my sort of Pan pipe, trying to bring people over into a new way of feeling towards what loving nature can be." Momentarily, he catches himself and pauses. "I'm worried this is all sounding like total bullshit."

If you want an excuse to stop reading, it's worth noting that *songdreaming* (note: self-conscious lower-case 's') is a collection of new songs full of bits recycled from traditional material, suffused with gaunt *Astral Weeks* jazz vibes performed by a north Londoner who – for one of his many side hustles – brings people out to the fields at night so they can watch him sing with nightingales.

The 43-year-old's unashamedly florid lyrical style may – for some – bring back harrowing memories of studying the romantic poets (as he rectorates nobly on the luscious McCrimmon: "Where England's mist lifts from her greening, a curlew croons in delight of this revealing"). Painfully earnest, *songdreaming* is in essence a record about country walks and the mystical power of landscape suffused with a deep belief that music might begin the process of healing the planet at a time of ecological apocalypse. If it had been released in 1989, there's a strong possibility that it would have featured Nigel Kennedy.

Getty

BACK STORY: FEEL FLOWS

● *songdreaming*'s deep textures owe something to exotic elements (Arabic qanun, Swedish nyckelharpa et al) and more to sensitive players. "I get to work with some very beautiful musicians who are great channellers," says Lee, crediting pianist James Keay and producer Bernard Butler (above) with enabling the music to flow. "You don't quite know what you're working towards, but it's about an intuition – allowing a deeper thought to emerge."

However, if there are any number of reasons to be sniffy about *songdreaming*, there is one killer argument in its favour: it's great. An autumn-toned tour de force, it melds yoga pants-era Bill Callahan pondering, the twittering rhapsodies of Kate Bush's *Aerial* and Incredible String Band cosmic wonder. It's an exploded *Liege & Lief* fronted by Ben Fogle. Don't pretend you're not curious.

Hipped to the majesty of the wild places by a spell in forest school as a child, Lee briefly studied at Chelsea College of Art but quit to become a Ray Mears-trained wilderness survival expert. Making the leap from conserving nature to preserving music, he spent time recording the songs of the British traveller community before becoming a recording artist himself: his 2012 debut *Ground Of Its Own* scoring the 'token folkie' Mercury Prize nomination.

Things got more interesting as he upped the baroque inflexions to the old songs on 2015's *The Fade In Time* and 2020's rapturously received *Old Wow*, but with *songdreaming* he has taken a step into more personal terrain, acknowledging that to tell the story he wants to tell, he has to use at least a few more words of his own.

Typically, opener Bushes And Briars has the title and some of the skeleton of a traditional song (Roud 1027 if you want to check), but Lee's herald of a planetary "reckoning divine" is very much his own. Over an ominous cloud of looming, Richard Thompson-style minor chords, brush drums and piercing violin, he sets out his worst fears (in what seems like an Old Testament Bert Jansch voice). "Sometimes I am uneasy and troubled in my mind," he sings. "Sometimes I think we've gone too far to turn it round in time."

However, if dark, globally-warmed skies hover over *songdreaming*, it's a record about beauty, Lee doing his best 'heaven in a wildflower' bit as he talks about the magic of getting out into the country on Meeting Is A Pleasant Place (a mutant version of Courting Is A Pleasure). "Measure England's mile with me old friend," Lee sings to what seems to be a hiking companion. "Our walk is our release."

McCrimmon hammers the point home, Lee draping a homage to the great green yonder over what might be a rewilded Nick Drake's Cello Song. "In awe," he sings in churchy rapture. "In awe, in awe forever." Green Mossy Banks weaves Irish pipes and what sounds like Old Testament prophecy into a serene reflection on the wonders of pilgrimage: getting out there, surrendering to old pathways. It's suffused with fear for future and despair on behalf of the generations who will inherit a smogged-up planet, but then from nowhere, Lee suddenly chimes in with a sweetly plummy version of American spiritual Bright Morning Stars. It should be appallingly cloying, but – thanks perhaps to the righteous Kibbo Kift certainty in his voice – it's quite overwhelming.

songdreaming is by no means perfect; Lee's version of Black Dog And Sheep Crook comes on a little too much like Dave Brubeck's Take Five, and his Anglicisation of Robert Burns ballad Aye Walking Oh feels a bit unnecessary. However, Lee does unaffected loveliness very well (case in point: the closing Sweet Girl McRee), and his intense empathy – for the bees, the trees, the birdies and his fellow man – shines through.

Dreams Of The Returning may provide *songdreaming*'s central thrust. As a garbled version of This Mortal Coil's Song To The Siren implodes around him, Lee telescopes again from micro into macro, his personal relationship with nature ("I was never good at geography," he confesses) steering him to a meditation on the age-old power that he hopes will continue to bring enlightened people back to the land. As he puts it: "To your source stay true."

Of course, *songdreaming* rests on messing with the source code. It's way too rich in jazz textures and vocal techniques gleaned from world music to pass as a trad folk record. However, if it acknowledges that the wisdom of our ancients can only go so far in solving very modern problems, Lee stands firmly by his conviction that salvation may come in re-forging that primal connection to the ground beneath our feet. If Lankum's blood'n'guts *False Lankum* chimed with the horrors and cynicism of 2023, then perhaps the mystic idealism of *songdreaming* offers hope of something more constructive to come.

"Be peregrine, be pasture, be tiny, be vaster," Lee sings, giving a boutique pep talk at the end of Green Mossy Banks. "Be as soft as green moss and be free." Pan's pipe is calling. Be brave and follow.

SAM SPEAKS! LEE ON FINDING HIS NARRATIVE VOICE, BUILDING BRIDGES AND BOILING FROGS.

Tales from the river bank: "I see myself as a bridge builder between eras," says Sam Lee.

"It's a slow boiling of the frog."

Sam Lee speaks to Jim Wirth.

What do you think is your big breakthrough on this record?

"For many years I've been working with traditional song and trying to find new sound-worlds for old songs. This record has been a big shift because it's been much more about trying to find a narrative voice. I've accepted that I like to write songs and am trying to create a body of work that speaks about my personal, but also our collective relationship, with nature on a poetic, on an ancient, but also very contemporary level."

What is on your mood board for *songdreaming*?

"I'm very interested in music that invokes trance-like states; Sufi music, a lot of north African Gnawa music, and also Adriatic and Grecian music, where it's all about the ceremony, the way communities enter into those states of ecstatic release. Sacred music, ultimately. These are elegies to nature in a way that religious music in olden times was there in service to the belief in God."

What does the word 'songdreaming' mean to you?

"It's a word that I have created; it's inspired through the idea of the songline and the dreamtime that we have borrowed from Aboriginal concepts. The English language is so bereft of words that speak about the land in the way we will have once done. We need to find a new lexicon and songdreaming for me is about how song and land are connected."

Do you see yourself as being as a folk musician?

"The thing about being a folk musician is that it's a bit of a straitjacket in terms of what that permits you to be and play and sound like. What I see myself as is a bridge builder between eras. The folk musician has more of an artisanal practice; one has to build that chair exactly the way that it was built. And I'm not interested in that. I'm interested in an alchemic kind of reforming; it is about creating a new role for these songs. I'm thinking of this work more as part of a medicinal role. It's a tonic. It's a salve. It's part of my own therapy for dealing with what I see in the world that troubles me environmentally and socially. It's all connected."

You think that in losing touch with nature we have lost touch with our essential selves?

"We've been going through a more than a human lifetime's period of separation and in that has come a great loss of identity. We live in one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, yet we aren't aware of what that really means. It's a kind of slow boiling of the frog. The disappearance of folk song is part of that. So how does music repair that bond?"

You have three wishes to help fix the universe: what are they?

"For the next 10 years, we should only have women in leadership. I'd like to have nature on the national curriculum so that all children have to learn their bird song and their plant identification. And every country's national anthem has to be an ancient traditional song and not be about power or God. What will the British one be? The Copper Family's Birds In The Spring."

Elbow

★★★★

Audio Vertigo

POLYDOR. CD/DL/LP

Built from "gnarly, seedy grooves", their tenth feels suitably landmark.

A panoply of touchstones informs *Audio Vertigo*, everything from Arctic Monkeys' recent spy-noir to Fela Kuti grooves to Smithsian indie (see Good Blood Mexico City) ennobling imagination-overload songs about self-deception, toxic relationships, and a real-life knife fight Elbow's frontman saw in Istanbul. Sung with his steamrollered Mancunian vowels intact, Garvey's allusive, playful lyrics are as golden as those of your Bermans and Caves here, drawing on Wordsworth, but also name-checking Leo Sayer and The Jungle Book's affable bear, Baloo. Brief segues such as Where Is It and Embers Of Day offer glimpses of Elbow at work –"Give it fat, wide wheels!" shouts Garvey parsing groove options for the former – while Her To The Earth fires on Stevie Wonder(ful) synth and the heavenly backing-vocals of Ella Hohnen-Ford, Kianja and Eliza Oakes.

James McNair

Norah Jones

★★★★

Visions

BLUE NOTE. CD/DL/LP

Multi-Grammy-winning singer/songwriter finds joy in musical rebirth.

Don't try to second-guess Norah Jones. Just when you think you've got her figured out, she'll reinvent herself, as she did with 2009's *The Fall*, which showed her grittier side, and 2012's *Little Broken Hearts*, an experimental hook-up with producer Danger Mouse. Her ninth album, *Visions*, her most unpredictable yet, is a fruitful collaboration with producer Leon Michels, best known for his work with soul revivalists Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings. Helped by Michels, whose grainy lo-fi production exudes a ramshackle charm, Jones has rediscovered her mojo, proving there's life after 2020's *Pick Me Up Off The Floor*, her joyless mid-life crisis album. Defined by the vibrant garage band rawness of Staring At The Wall, featuring Jones's jangly guitar and the incantatory I'm Awake with its "Fly a kite all your life, don't let go, it will be all right" refrain, *Visions* suggests Jones has successfully exorcised her demons.

Charles Waring

Liam Gallagher John Squire

★★★★

Liam Gallagher John Squire

PARLOPHONE. CD/DL/LP

Oasis singer and Stone Roses guitar whiz become the Fab Two.

This Manc super-duo album poses a fascinating question: were some of the ideas here originally for the third Roses LP that never was? No one's letting on, yet Gallagher fits effortlessly in his hero Ian Brown's shoes, his quartz-edged voice the perfect plating for Squire's roving *Physical Graffiti* guitar gymnastics set atop melodious, mid-Beatles-y songs. Sometimes, as on Mother Nature's Song, we're back in the Roses' chiming Mersey Paradise; elsewhere, as with Just Another Rainbow and I'm Bored, the Fabs are mercilessly plundered (namely, Rain and Paperback Writer). What's really interesting is hearing Liam being stretched stylistically, most notably on the bluesy rocker I'm A Wheel, a close cousin of Wings' Let Me Roll It, though the real joy comes with his voicing Squire's nastiest lyrics – "You should have fucked me when you had a chance" being the prize exhibit. Too much fun to be a one-off.

Pat Gilbert

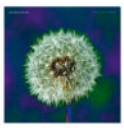
The Bevis Frond

★★★★

Focus On Nature

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

Uncrowned classic-rock king Nick Saloman's brilliant 25th album.



Defying the law of diminishing returns, Saloman's The Bevis Frond just seem to get better and better, their expertise and urgency only growing with age. By our calculation, this one's their seventh consecutive double-LP, and it's fully the equal of underground classics like 1991's *New River Head* for its deluge of melodic riches, lyrical depth, stylistic diversity and explosive guitar-playing. Where 2021's *Little Eden* railed against evil in broken Britain, *Focus On Nature* opens with Heat's nightmarish, post-punk foreboding of eco-catastrophe, quickly followed by the title track's exquisitely harmonised folk rock idyll. As Saloman soon variously nails Wipers-y thrumming (God's Gift), late-'60s Kinks whimsy (I'm A Mirror) and Comfortably Numb-era Floyd (Mr Freds Disco), his lyrical lens pans across musicianly kvetch (The Hug, etc), gut-churning fast food (Happy Wings), execrable fashions (Hairstreaks) and more. The songwriting's uniformly exceptional, the messaging on-the-nose and inspiring – and boy, can he still play guitar.

Andrew Perry

The Black Crowes

★★★★

Happiness Bastards

SILVER ARROW. CD/DL/LP

The Robinsons' first studio LP in 15 years.

Sparked by the brawling Robinson brothers' 2019 reconciliation – "We made the decision to be adults", guitarist Rich has said – *Happiness Bastards* is infinitely better than its 'will this do?' cover art portends. Tapping myriad trusted influences yet distilling something uniquely corvine, it's a thrilling return, oozing sass and swagger. A professed AC/DC influence motors incisive tale of a Johnny Thunders wannabe Rats & Clowns, Cross Your Fingers blends *Led Zeppelin III*-style acoustica with a chunk of righteous funk, and Chris Robinson and rising country star Lainey Wilson's duet Wilted Rose waltzes to a spectacular coda. Pleasingly devoid of flab, *Happiness Bastards* is great news for Crowes fans; even better news for the Robinsons' mom, Nancy. "It broke my heart", she has said of her sons' long estrangement. With results this good, why didn't they make up sooner?

James McNair

Out on a limb: Elbow get the balance right on *Audio Vertigo*.

Dominick Tyler, Athena Caramitsos

Faye Webster: letting painful truths filter through the dark spaces.

No tux given

Atlantan polymath conducts herself to highest standards through fifth album.
By Victoria Segal.

Faye Webster

★★★★

Underdressed At The Symphony

SECRETLY CANADIAN. CD/DL/LP

LOOK BACK over Faye Webster's career and you might suspect that she's been storyboarded by the makers of a '70s kids' animation about an intrepid, sweet-voiced singer-songwriter. She's a yo-yo champion, a photographer, a baseball fan; she loves computer games and turns her hand to synchronised swimming and Hawaiian dancing in her videos. Her songs have gone viral on TikTok, but she's also rooted in Atlanta's hip-hop and alt-country scenes. Add in a cameo for Barack Obama, who chose Webster's Better Distractions as one of his 2020 favourites, and Hanna-Barbera have a next-gen hit on their hands.

There is, however, nothing cartoonish about Webster's music: her fifth album, *Underdressed At The Symphony*, operates in warm-blooded 3D, casting a distinctive shadow. If her songwriting keeps true to the title of 2021's *I Know I'm Funny Haha*, it's also funny-peculiar, never approaching its heartbreak or anxieties from a conventional angle, using its materials – Nels Cline's guitar, Matt Stoessel's pedal steel and Nick Rosen's piano – in a way that doesn't quite line up with the singer-songwriter manuals.

Take He Loves Me Yeah! – it has a none-more-pop title and sounds like anime Lana Del Rey, but it's wholly disorientating, a cute avatar that may hide something less "perfect" than the lyrics insist. But Not Kiss begins in a blanket-warm drowse before a sudden crash of piano and horns, a wonderful quiet-loud dynamic Mogwai would understand. Opening track Thinking About You, meanwhile, repeats those words over consoling barroom instrumentation, but ends with a little chime, like a phone alarm set to break a daydream. Back to reality.

It's this inner space that Webster beautifully recreates, a place of complicated emotional retreats and advances. She writes a lot about boredom – counterintuitive for anyone hoping to catch an audience's attention, maybe, but on the brilliant flute-laced eBay Purchase History, the AutoTuned Feeling Good Today ("finding a new hobby just to ditch it"), or the languidly ticking Tttttime, blank spaces let the painful truths filter through. Money is spent "just to feel something", but Lego Ring, featuring school friend Lil Yachty, turns an odd fixation on a bit of plastic crystal into a clever meditation on self-determination, real value, true love.

Underdressed At The Symphony refers to Webster's habit – more distraction – of attending classical concerts at the last minute. She wears the drama of these songs lightly, too, all the better to cause a sharp intake of breath when she sings, "I know you haven't told your mother yet /Because she invited me over again" on the title track's condensed break-up vignette, or "When I said I mean it/Didn't really mean it" over Lifetime's concussed drums. She might describe a scattered mindset, the endless quest to escape yourself, but don't be deceived: these songs have the substance to become– unlike those eBay purchases – an obsession that sticks.

Hands on: Gary Clark Jr expands his blues-based palette.

Altered images

Guest-filled fourth album from nouveau blues-and-more guitarist. By Mark Blake.

Gary Clark Jr

★★★★

JPEGRAW

WARNER BROS. CD/DL/LP

HABITS, THE final song on *JPEGRAW*, lasts for nine minutes. Partway through, this otherwise melancholy ballad is upended by a blast of martial drumming, followed by choral backing voices, a dash of flamenco and a bombastic guitar solo. It's Gary Clark Jr's Purple Rain, if you will, and screams 'serious artist'. But the drama never overwhelms the music, and this delicate balance carries over to the rest of his new album.

JPEGRAW's predecessor, 2019's *This Land*, was a Billboard Top 10 hit, whose flagship single and title track offered a stinging critique of Donald Trump's divided America. Aided by an earlier Grammy Award (for the 2014 song, Please Come Home), and musical love-ins with the Foo Fighters and Alicia Keys, it was a concerted effort to take Clark Jr out of the reductive blues-prodigy niche and into the mainstream.

All of which feels like a precursor to this, his best (if worst-titled) work so far. Sometimes *JPEGRAW*'s 12 tracks feel like they're ticking boxes: a flurry of lounge piano here, a blast of jazz trumpet there… But there's a clarity to the writing, with his vaulting ambition accompanied by strong hooks and an even stronger pop sensibility.

The opening song Maktub, and Don't Stop, the last a collaboration with Memphis songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Valerie June, tap into familiar territory: heavy mantric blues, full of fuzzy riffs and foreboding lyrics ("Time for a new revolution… gunning for you"). This sometimes becomes a default setting on slightly weaker numbers such as Triumph and Hearts In Retrogade. But there's enough happening elsewhere to compensate.

This Is Who We Are finds space for a nursery-rhyme chorus, a howling guitar solo *and* London-Ghanian vocalist/producer Naala, without overcrowding the song. Meanwhile, Hyperwave and Alone Together (which showcases trumpeter and vocalist Keyon Harrold), are the album's sleeper hits-in-waiting.

Clark Jr's other A-list guests complement rather than hijack their respective songs. In truth, George Clinton dials it in for Funk Witch U, but Stevie Wonder's voice elevates the charming What About The Children?, scattering *Innervisions* and *Talking Book*-style stardust over another potential single.

The guitar purists are still well served. Clark Jr's playing on everything is measured and dynamic but rarely overpowering. However, soul, hip-hop and pop are as much a part of the palette as the blues. Early on, the title track scoops all these disparate influences together into one defiant mini-symphony.

The aforementioned closing song, Habits, feels like a companion piece to JPEGRAW, then. "I know nothing is for sure," he declares, before the song takes off in the first of many unexpected directions. By the end of the album, these words feels like a mission statement for Gary Clark Jr's music going forward.

Skyway Man

★★★★

Flight Of The Long Distance Healer

MAMA BIRD. CD/DL/LP

A concept album about aliens. But good.

The near-incomprehensible concept – involving a cache of found letters and telepathic messages involving spiritual aliens – is either bonkers or, more likely, a ruse. No matter, Californian James Wallace's third outing as Skyway Man is a cavalcade of insistent, harmony-laden delights. The summery veneer suggests a more fleet-of-foot Polyphonic Spree, but there's both balm and darkness under the surface. The wise opener The Holding On ("When holding on kept you from healing…") sets the tone and the lachrymose closer Do Something Good completes it, but Moonlight Thunder is a rare homage to The Kinks' Apeman until the trombone and trumpet kick in; the near-title-track Long Distance Healing pulses like a quieter Muse, and the countrified The Mothlight reads like a deathbed confession. The irony, of course, is that Wallace doesn't need letters or telepathic aliens to prop him up. He stands tall anyway.

John Aizlewood

Chris O'Leary

★★★★

The Hard Line

ALLIGATOR. CD/DL/LP

New dispatches from the front line of the blues.

O'Leary is a tough singer and a powerful harmonica-player, but what raises him above the ruck – and what has no doubt earned him a place in the Alligator catalogue – is his inventive songwriting. He doesn't drift far from conventional blues formats, but his subjects are often novel, and even when they aren't, his angle on them is always surprising and his language fresh and cliché-free, as in Lost My Mind or the rueful You Break It, You Bought It. Or take the sadly familiar road story of Who Robs A Musician?: "You can tell by the Chevy my wallet ain't heavy, still got dents from the last three collisions… I gotta ask myself: what kinda sonofabitch robs a musician?" The band, headed by guitarist Chris Vitarello, is stone-solid.

Tony Russell

Oisin Leech

★★★★

Cold Sea

OUTSIDE MUSIC/TREMONE. CD/DL/LP

Cinematic first solo album from Lost Brother.

Co-vocalist with Alex Turner on the Arctic Monkeys' cover of Baby I'm Yours, singer in indie nearlymen The 747s and half of dark Irish acoustic duo The Lost Brothers, Oisin Leech is in lush, filmic mode on his solo debut. On an album recorded in just four days on the Donegal coast, M Ward plays guitar on the stately October Sun, Bob Dylan's long-term bandsman Tony Garnier adds bass throughout and Irish folk giant Donal Lunny brings the bouzouki. It's a warm, reflective collection, sometimes with strings and synths and it moves with galleon-like serenity, most notably on the brief Maritime Radio, where twinkling guitars back a reading of the shipping forecast, and the instrumental title track. Leech's understated vocals add Nick Drake-style rue and John Martyn-esque mystery to Colour Of The Rain, but he's no plagiarist: he's taking his own path.

John Aizlewood

Sheer Mag

★★★★

Playing Favorites

THIRD MAN. CD/DL/LP

Female-fronted East Coast '70s pop-rock lovers hit FM gold.

In the info trailing Sheer Mag's third album, singer Christina Halladay laments contemporary pop radio's lack of "straight-up rock bangers", fully confident that their third record carries an abundance thereof. The Philadelphian quartet, who coalesced at uni in Purchase, NY, initially self-released three EPs and two LPs, all licensed in the UK through London's Static Shock, and they've chosen an auspicious moment, given Third Man's bonus muscle, to up their game. Two years in the making, *Playing Favorites* outgrew initial plans for a disco-influenced EP – hence Moonstruck's Chic celebration of romantic breakthrough. Other themes surface (see Tuareg-shredder Mdou Moctar's grandstand solo on Mechanical Garden), but Sheer Mag generally present a gender-balanced, sometimes yacht-y 2020s take on Cheap Trick powerpop. Halladay yells with hyper-melodic exuberance like Cyndi Lauper, her voice cracking to top off the Mags' chops-rich jams with soulful grit. In any just universe, *Playing Favorites* would dominate the world's FM stations for two years straight.

Andrew Perry

Marry Waterson & Adrian Crowley

★★★★

Cuckoo Storm

ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT. CD/DL/LP

Beak praxis: folk scion teams up to hit goth-prog-jazz sweet spot.

"I've had bad dreams my love and not yet been to bed," sings Marry Waterson on Undear Sphere, the Vampire Weekend-by-candlelight opener to this omen-heavy collaborative effort with Irish singer-songwriter Adrian Crowley. Blessed with a voice like unpaid bills, Waterson has inherited her mother's elliptical lyrical skill (skilfully repurposing one of the late Lal's own lines for Arthur Rimbaud tribute One Foot Of Silver, One Foot Of Gold), and has once more found a kindred musical spirit, just a year after her trad-arr all-star link-up with Lisa Knapp and Nathaniel Mann as Hack-Poets Guild. Waterson and Crowley do a cadaverous Nancy Sinatra and Lee Hazlewood on Lovers In The Waves, and dredge up the story of an unknown woman found floating in the Seine in the 1880s for grisly source material on Heavy Wings. Like Kirsty MacColl at the helm of *Islands*-era King Crimson, prepare for plenty of signs – and wonders too.

Jim Wirth

Mo Kolours

★★★★

Original Flow

WE RELEASE JAZZ. CD/DL/LP

Powerfully soulful concoction of laconic, jazzy, Afrocentric jams.

Half-Mauritian, half-English musician Joseph Deenmamode relocated five years ago to find inspirational solitude in the Japanese countryside. Now he folds jazz, loose-limbed funk, hip-hop and fluid sega rhythms into his fourth album, *Original Flow*. There's an appealing, improv quality to its 21 tracks, whose provenance is jam sessions conducted with Deenmamode's brothers, Reginald Omas Mamode and Jeen Bassa, and a collection of pals. As its title suggests, original, organic loops create a sinuous flow. They're accompanied by a lyrical thread devised to uplift and empower but, also, to critique the world's political order. "They wanna send rockets to Mars," Deenmamode observes on the Cymande-esque street soul of Rockets To Mars, "but down here my people starve." It's joined by quasi live house workouts (Love Vibration), reflective hip-hop (Tatamaka Part 2) and Afro-futuristic broken beat (Nah Personal). A seductive, exhilarating album that crackles with personality and deep vibes.

Stephen Worthy

Gossip

★★★★

Real Power

SONY MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

Real song power, that is. Gems galore on their first LP for 11 years.

Rick Rubin famously oversaw Gossip's 2009 LP *Music For Men*, and it was at his request/encouragement, we learn, that the group's 2019 live reunion spilled over into this studio comeback. Hatched at Rubin's tropical Kauai HQ, *Real Power* is a wondrous pairing of '70s disco-influenced bangers and '80s pop exuberance, nods to Chic (Give It Up For Love), Miami Sound Machine and Donna Summer (the brilliant title track), and the best instincts of Cyndi Lauper and Madonna all detectable. Beth Ditto's Rolls-Royce of a voice is the divine electricity that powers it all, pitch-perfect and hugely emotive atop the percussive groove of Don't Be Afraid, and bedding-down somewhere between Natalie Merchant and Chaka Khan on yet another doozy, Tell Me Something. Early contender for pop album of the year? Definitely. No wonder Rubin wanted to reconnect.

James McNair

Aircooled

★★★★

Eat The Gold

MUSIC'S NOT DEAD. DL/LP

Sussex quartet's second: the greatest Kraut-gospel-funk party album ever?

From the burgeoning 'new Seattle' of St Leonards-on-Sea, this Neu!-loving quartet propelled by Elastica, Lush and Jesus And Mary Chain drummer Justin Welch here evolve apace. Where 2022's debut *St Leopards* packed four sprawling motorik instrumentals, two lasting 15 minutes-plus, this follow-up sees the focus sharpen to six monster tracks, each five-to-eight minutes long, four featuring doubled-up vocal raps from 'synthesist' Riz Maslen and guitarist Oliver Cherer, all drenched in stargazing euphoria. Airports opens as a thrilling Neu!-scape variant, the iconic Klaus Dinger beat mutated amid shimmering keys to a near-baggy shuffle, until 4:51 when a female choir ecstatically voices the band's name, ushering in a Damascene upward-spiralling climax. Aircooled soon get down-and-dirty: No Reason To Lie thunders on Katherine Wallinger's Trouble Funk bass line, while male-female high-tension rhymes express powder-keg frustration. The rest is equally exhilarating, making *Eat The Gold* a danceable tonic to see off those bleak midwinter blues.

Andrew Perry

Laetitia Sadier

★★★★

Rooting For Love

DRAG CITY/DUOPHONIC SUPER 45s. CD/DL/LP

Exquisite art-pop meditation on healing from the Stereolab co-founder.

On The Dash, one of this LP's Anglophone songs with an unmistakable elegant touch, Laetitia Sadier addresses the "discrete shine of your darkness". Although similar oxymora and metaphors appeared on her previous works, *Rooting For Love* comes across as the artist's most adventurous work to date. At times, the scale of experimentation and intensity resonates with that of Björk's *Fossora* (see polychronic chant-like La Nageuse Nue or Krautrock-ish closer Cloud 6). Similarly, most songs on *Rooting For Love* feature a group of backing vocalists simply credited as The Choir. The overall sonic complexity amplifies the idea behind the album: transformation through love and co-creation on collective and personal levels. With melodies as undulating as, perhaps, a path for self-understanding can be, the 10 tracks share an eclecticism with Stereolab's *Cobra…* and therapeutic quirkiness with Meredith Monk. An alleviating statement from an artist whose curiosity and striving for development have remained a driving force.

Irina Shtreis

Strange Boy

★★★★

Love Remains

GROENLAND. DL/LP

London duo's uncanny debut, recorded in a neo-gothic crypt.

Some band names are perfect. Kieran Brunt and Matt Huxley are Strange Boy, friends since bonding over Joanna Newsom at Glastonbury; though these enthralling, elegant ballads have no obvious provenance. Take lead single Boston Blue Period: gently percolating synths give way to gorgeously drifting strings and Brunt's androgynous voice spiralling through the ether. The mood throughout is warm, but shivery too; arrangements are minimal to say the least, including Brunt's performance. When he occasionally lifts off (eg, the operatic climax to Annunciation), one possible pointer is Billy Mackenzie fronting The Blue Nile, but Strange Boy are stranger, more electronic, and on 100,000 Fireflies scary like Twin Peaks. Lyrics like "Oh the darkness, and oh the toil/The grasping mirror, the fry and boils" (Sofia) suggest an immersive world of their own making.

Martin Aston

Julia Holter

★★★★

Something In The Room She Moves

DOMINO. CD/DL/LP

Believe and how: first album in six years from experimental singer-songwriter.

THE BEATLES-mangling title of Julia Holter's sixth studio album signposts the disorientating space her songs inhabit – almost familiar, yet suffused with dream-like light, logic and language ("What is the opposite love in becoming fish," she sings on hymn to creation Spinning). The follow-up to 2018's diffuse *Aviary*, *Something In The Room She Moves* is informed by the shifts of loss and motherhood as much as Joni Mitchell and Robert Wyatt, stretches of beauty – not least the telekinetic whirl of Sun Girl or Evening Mood's filtered heartbeat– shadowed by an off-kilter precarity (emphasised by Meyou's choral wildness). "There's something in a vacuum/And there's nothing in the front room," she sings on the title track, the crispest echo of 2015's *Have You In My Wilderness* but an eerie reminder that nothing is ever quite where you left it – especially a songwriter this beautifully elusive.

Victoria Segal

Going deep: Julia Holter is as beautifully elusive as ever.

Camille Blake

Oh brother: The Jesus And Mary Chain's Jim (left) and William Reid say aye to *...Eyes*.

Honey come home

The Reid brothers make peace on eighth album. By Keith Cameron.

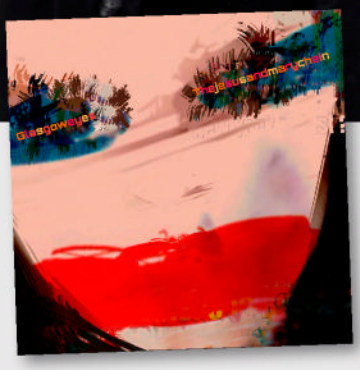
The Jesus And Mary Chain

★★★★

Glasgow Eyes

FUZZ CLUB. CD/DL/LP/MC

IN 1987, The Jesus And Mary Chain released a song called Bo Diddley Is Jesus on a B-side, together with their cover of Diddley's Who Do You Love. It felt like the new iconoclasts honouring one of rock'n'roll's true pioneers. Almost 40 years later, the thought occurs that in return Jim and William Reid must have received a hoodoo blessing capable of healing the most grievous wounds. There's no more likely explanation for this notoriously turbulent partnership still functioning, let alone kicking against the pricks – internal and otherwise – with the levels of vitality displayed here.



This is only the second album of a reunion that began in 2007, almost 10 years after a bitter split. Although 2017's *Damage And Joy* was enjoyable enough, its patchwork of new songs with re-recorded solo material suggested a measure of careful brand management. *Glasgow Eyes*, however, feels much more emotionally invested. In the self-referential Bo Diddley tradition, two keystone songs actually cite the band by name: Jamcod ("J-A-M-C O-D!") sardonically describes 1998's on-stage break-up, while the elegiac Second Of June is a chiming hymn to the twisted blood ties that keep the Reids together despite so much accumulated hurt. "All those things are dead," Jim sings. "Brother, can you hear me calling you?"

Recorded at Mogwai's Castle Of Doom studio in the Reids' birth city, *Glasgow Eyes*' liberal use of electronic textures is a renewing force, and a kind of homecoming too. With Rezillos' singer Fay Fife joining Jim for the closest this band will get to a wellness mantra ("I'm all right, I'm OK/Well OK, I'm all right"), opener Venal Joy's insecticidal pulsations recall 1984's home demo, the Portastudio recording that future JAMC drummer Bobby Gillespie subsequently described as "Suicide meets Generation X meets The Velvet Underground", a blueprint that sounds smarter than ever. The Eagles And The Beatles evokes Iggy and his Dum Dum Boys at Chinnichap Productions circa 1974, with name-dropping larks galore ("I've been rolling with the Stones/Mick and Keith and Brian Jones/Andrew Oldham's on the phone…"). Mediterranean X Film, meanwhile, is William's typically idiosyncratic framing of the political/musical post-war-punk interface: "Churchill and De Gaulle/Berlin and the Wall/The Bunny boys and The Fall/I think I loved them all".

Both that song and the groovily numbed-out Silver Strings cast JAMC as the house band at a David Lynch sad disco – a role they were born into. Of course, the darklands are never far away, with Chemical Animal repurposing Just Like Honey's Be My Baby beat for Jim's haunted analysis of addiction ("I fill myself with chemicals/To hide the dark shit I don't show"). Yet in its bright, shivery, razor-sharp exposition of the love and devotion which boils at The Jesus And Mary Chain's heart, *Glasgow Eyes* is a positive twist in the saga of these negaholics synonymous. Whatever next – a happy ending?

Mel Butler

Karl Bartos

★★★

The Cabinet Of Dr Caligari

BUREAU B. CD/DL/LP

Former Kraftwerk man gets to grips with a Weimar Republic cinema classic.

There's an aptness to Karl Bartos writing a new soundtrack for the benchmark 1920 German expressionist silent film The Cabinet Of Dr Caligari. He was in Kraftwerk, whose warping of realism was akin to that achieved by director Robert Wiene. Bartos styles his new work as "narrative film music and sound design". The 76-minute suite mixes longer pieces for the film's major story elements with shorter, impressionistic segments for its linking sections. Despite working with a computer, he balances Stravinsky-like tension, Schoenberg-esque atonality and the classicism of Mozart to harmonise with the film's off-balance nature. There are precedents: the UK's Geoff Smith created a soundtrack in 2003; two decades earlier, Bill Nelson wrote music for a stage adaptation. Yet – even without the visuals – Bartos's aural bricolage stands apart due to its instinctive drama, a quality shared with the on-screen imagery.

Kieron Tyler

Moor Mother

★★★★

The Great Bailout

ANTI-. CD/DL/LP

Experimental jazz and blues targeting the UK's slave legacy.

There's a palpable rage coursing through the ninth album from Philadelphian poet, artist and musician Camae Ayewa, AKA Moor Mother. In her crosshairs is the brutal legacy of the British slave trade – of the terrible physical and mental price paid by enslaved Africans and the 'compensation' paid to slave and plantation owners by the UK government post-abolition. It's purposefully uncomfortable listening. Death By Longitude, for example – "46,000 British slave owners, bailout, bailout, bailout…" growls Ayewa – is a riotous cacophony of feedback and pummelling beats. On God Save The Queen, Ayewa posits "God save the Queen… because who else's life has value?" over a discordant mix of soul/operatic vocals and spoken word, crashing cymbals and portentous piano. Even when the music softens, as on the experimental blues of My Souls Been Anchored, it carries a monumental, yearning sadness. *The Great Bailout* is a grand, artistic and political statement in an age when such vision is too rarely attempted.

Stephen Worthy

Sheherazaad

★★★★

Qasr

ERASED TAPES. CD/DL/LP

Startling introduction to a Californian who merges jazz with RD Burman.

You have big boots to fill if your namesake had a pivotal role as a storyteller in The One Thousand And One Nights, but the San Francisco-born Sheherazaad – her roots are in both north and south India – appears up to the task. Produced by Arooj Aftab, this five-track, 24-minute collection is the perfect calling card (a self-released debut, 2020's *Khwaabistan*, may have reached few ears, but they were all influential). Opening with flurries of classical guitar and the slow burn of Mashoor (the singer's thoughts on the toxicity of fame), it picks up steam and drama with Dhund Lo Mujhe and keeps you on the edge of your seat thereafter. Pick of the quintet is Koshish, which "revamps the surfer genre with Hindi-Urdu and Brown beach bodies", its glorious melodies and harmonies every bit a match for peak Brian Wilson. Magical.

David Hutcheon

Sheherazaad: magical, edge-of-your-seat stuff.

Zayira Ray

Pissed Jeans

★★★★

Half-Divorced

SUB POP. CD/DL/LP

Debt, parenthood and catalytic converters: scabrous noisers sing the suburban blues.

Midlife crises await all who live long enough, even repulsively named Pennsylvanian 'pigfuck' revivalists Pissed Jeans. Their sixth LP ditches the savvy anti-machoism and perversity of earlier outings to vent the frustrations of punks-turned-dads who, as the title suggests, are struggling to acclimatise to domesticity. Possibly the only hardcore LP to rail at seatbelt alarms and "helicopter parenting", *Half-Divorced*'s bougie targets are nevertheless dispatched with extreme prejudice, accompanied by a brutish clatter that pairs the bloody-minded, avant flourishes of late Black Flag to Oi! anthemics. As such, the LP's worldview is best articulated by Everywhere Is Bad, a withering, TV Party-esque list-song finding fault with pretty much every location across the globe ("Helsinki? Too cold/Rome? Catholic-controlled!"). But Pissed Jeans' fist-pumping tunes, thrilling noise and acidic wit ensure their permanent bummer is always a good time.

Stevie Chick

Bardo Pond

★★★★

Volume 9

FIRE. DL/LP

A cathartic experience from the mighty Pennsylvanian psych-rockers.

In 2005, Philadelphia-based psych mavericks Bardo Pond sat down to work on instrumental pieces that would mark a shift from the more conventional material on their studio LPs. Recorded in one go, the resulting improvisatory compositions formed the basis of the *Volume* series. Now four-track *Volume 9* features founding guitarists John and Michael Gibbons, vocalist/flautist Isobel Sollenberger, and drummer Michael Zanghi (Kurt Vile/The War On Drugs). Just as with their unusual creative union, the LP finds its fulcrum point in paradox. The acoustic core of opener Conjunctio defies gravity, providing a scaffold for dense, thundering guitars and celestial drone. Twenty-one-minute closer War Is Over Pt 2 evolves slowly into an overpowering force, not far from Sigur Rós's *()* LP. Zooming out to a galactic scale, it epitomises this stunning and transformative album.

Irina Shtreis

EXPERIMENTAL

BY JOHN MULVEY

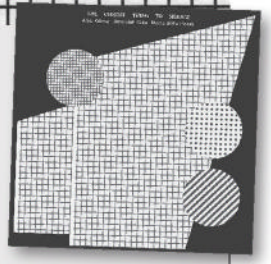
Ariel Kalma, Jeremiah Chiu & Marta Sofia Honer

★★★★

The Closest Thing To Silence

INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM. CD/DL/LP

A New Age reveille for 2024.



"The most beautiful sound next to silence," promised ECM Records in the 1970s, and the title of this equally beautiful album suggests microscopic adjustments in the soundfield; a pursuit of true ambience. But *The Closest Thing To Silence* is actually radiant and pulsating, occupying the fertile zone where New Age music and minimalist composition intersect. The French musician Ariel Kalma has long form in this sector since the 1970s, while the LA-based pair of Chiu and Honer are newer to the game, with one exceptional duo album in 2022's *Recordings From The Åland Islands* (viola player Honer's CV also includes sessions with Beyoncé). This serenely flowing collaboration mixes rippling synths with string arrangements and Kalma's meditative woodwind tones; Terry Riley's *Reed Streams* might be a good analogy. And as the album builds to the rapturous epiphanies of Stack Attack, another Riley landmark comes to mind: *A Rainbow In Curved Air.*

ALSO RELEASED

Brian Harnetty

★★★★

The Workbench

WINESAP. DL

The Ohio composer's last album, 2022's *Words And Silences*, matched recordings of theologian Thomas Merton to chamber music, and this follow-up only intensifies his work's delicate emotional heft. Harnetty creates a threnody for his late father out of voice messages, the watches and music boxes he mended, and his sleeping breaths in a hospice, underpinned by bass clarinet, violin, cello and piano. Dignified, meticulous, profoundly moving sound art.

Dean McPhee

★★★★

Astral Gold

BASS RITUAL. DL/LP

The Yorkshire guitarist's progress from beatific folk picking to a reverberant kosmische twang has been so mellow over the past 15 years as to be barely perceptible. But here, on his fifth solo album, he achieves a sort of elegantly blackened transcendence: like, roughly, Michael Rother and Bohren & Der Club Of Gore enacting a slow-motion ritual in the remotest Pennines.

Thollem, Terry Riley, Nels Cline

★★★

The Light Is Real

OTHER MINDS. DL/LP

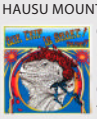
The 88-year-old Riley himself manifests, trading voice improvisations with the San Franciscan keyboardist Thollem, who then samples them through a synth and drafts in Wilco's Cline – at his most free-form – to add needling guitar to an already agitated mix. Disorienting scat babble dominates rather than Riley's beloved just intonation, making it tonal kin to his early tape experiments like You're Nogood.

Various

★★★

Our Trip Is Short Vol. 7

HAUSU MOUNTAIN. DL



Chicago's Hausu Mountain have been putting out Grateful Dead/Phish tribute albums for seven years, pushing jam band archetypes into significantly freakier zones. Some hyper acid-techno meltdowns update Merry Prankster irreverence, but the highlights here tend to be languid psych blurrings of the Dead canon: note, especially, Josh Olken and Ragenap turning Dark Star into something like a Flying Saucer Attack track. *JM*

Collective conscience: Kim Gordon navigates the fractured landscapes of modern life.

Kim Gordon

★★★★

The Collective

MATADOR. CD/DL/LP

Former Sonic Youth superstar continues her singular quest.

THERE'S SOMETHING haunting about Kim Gordon's second post-Sonic Youth solo album – not the gauzy drift of the picturesque supernatural, but the thrilling poltergeist racket that comes with a good séance. Like 2019's *No Home Record*, *The Collective* is a collaboration with Angel Olsen/Charli XCX producer Justin Raisen, its industrial trap-pop death-rattling deep in the pipes of an overloaded world. The power-tool thrum of I'm A Man is a deadpan channelling of toxic masculinity, while Bye Bye's packing-list mundanity ("iBook/power cord/medications") is destabilised by angle-grinder beats, landing like a tally of consumer-culture grave goods. Fractured landscapes, internal and external, are not unfamiliar spaces to the magisterial Gordon (deadpan even on Psychedelic Orgasm), but The Candy House's garbled distress flare or the My Bloody Neubauten of I Don't Miss My Mind confirm she is still picking up signals nobody else can.

Victoria Segal

Jacob Collier

★★★

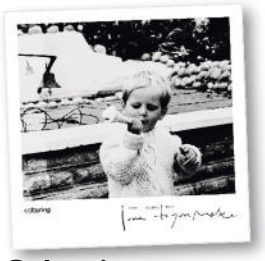
Djesse Vol. 4

DECCA. CD/DL/LP

The last of jazz-pop chameleon's album series.

The first British artist to win Grammys for his first four LPs, Collier sells truckloads of albums in the US, where he's feted like a superstar, but in the UK, he's still flying under the radar of mainstream adulation. Perhaps that's because his grandiose musical vision, epitomised by *Djesse*, a quadruple-album project on an epic scale, resonates more with America's 'Dream Big' mentality. Like the previous three *Djesse* LPs, the set's denouement is the aural equivalent of a roller-coaster ride, its 21 tunes giddily flitting from R&B to South Asian music and even death metal. Impressive, too, is Collier's enormous guest list (everyone from Stormzy to Steve Vai), which reads like a Who's Who of pop. Though some will dismiss it as wildly overblown, even Collier's harshest critics might grudgingly concede that as finales go, *Djesse*'s conclusion is breath-taking.

Charles Waring



Colouring

★★★★

Love To You, Mate

BELLA UNION. CD/DL

Jack Kenworthy's contemplative follow-up to 2019's *Wake*.

Love To You, Mate positively aches. Its gently ticking over, purring electronica is a product of anguish and desolation. It chronicles the loss of Greg Baker, the brother-in-law of Colouring's Jack Kenworthy, to cancer in 2021. The title track cuts completely to the chase, recounting the strange, almost otherworldly normality and sense of calm that can descend on a family when something of that magnitude arrives. As an example, For You captures the emotions when the diagnosis was received. However, *Love To You, Mate* is no 'cancer concept album' – although the music matches the ruminative mood of the lyrics, the overriding emotions are positivity and togetherness. Kenworthy says that a family's journey together in the face of adversity can be both "brutal" and "beautiful". The nightfall sound of the Blue Nile is a musical touchpoint, but *Love To You, Mate* is a very unique creation.

Daryl Easlea

Whitelands

★★★★

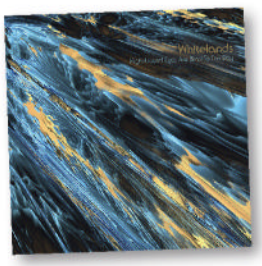
Night-bound Eyes Are Blind To The Day

SONIC CATHEDRAL. CD/DL/LP

Black shoegazing's new torchbearers issue their wake-up call.

Whitelands' debut album, its title taken from Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet, doesn't instantly make its case. From third track Cheer, the energy levels pick up and feet hit the gas. Up to this point, the openly Slowdive-influenced style does not escape the shadows of their inspiration; after, there's more angularity than their artistic stimulus, increased kineticism and a greater toughness. Founder member Etienne Quartey-Papafio is evidently still processing the live Slowdive session he discovered on YouTube in 2019, which became decisive to finding a musical direction. When forming Whitelands – named to acknowledge shoegazing's constituency – after that internet encounter, he assumed a black shoegazing outfit was an anomaly. But then he discovered AR Kane – who have remixed a non-album Whitelands track – and the '80s-born, still active North Carolina band The Veldt. Now, Whitelands are picking up the reins.

Kieron Tyler



Big Big Train

★★★

The Likes Of Us

INSIDE OUT. CD/DL/LP

Veterans of new prog introduce new singer Alberto Bravin.

Can you still pack a punch with a musical arsenal mostly reclaimed from 1970s prog rock? As the blustery Oblivion, the album's first single, reaches its close, doubts set in. But then comes Beneath The Masts, a 17-minute multi-part epic. Amid neo-classical chords and a whiff of early Genesis, this is BBT riding high, the music intricate but light on its feet. Some pleasingly wistful tunes follow, with new vocalist Alberto Bravin an honourable replacement for the late David Longdon, his tone lighter, less grainy. The MTV power balladry of Love Is The Light is not exactly what fans signed up for, and the band's increasingly cosmopolitan line-up has smoothed out some of the English quirkiness. The drama of Last Eleven, though, is a stirring sign-off.

John Bungey

Kaiser Chiefs

★★★

Kaiser Chiefs' Easy Eighth Album

V2. CD/DL/LP/MC

Album number eight. Nobody predicts a riot.

When Kaiser Chiefs were rattling out early-career anthems such as I Predict A Riot and Ruby, it seemed as though the world was theirs for the taking. It wasn't quite that simple. The well of anthems ran dry around the time frustrated drummer Nick Hodgson left in 2012, while erratic shows in 2022 suggested all was far from well. Yet, here they are for the first time since 2019's *Duck* and they're still shape-shifting. Now in thrall to the post-punk disco of LCD Soundsystem, the fate-temptingly titled *Easy Eighth Album* finds Nile Rodgers guesting on the spry Feeling Alright and David Arnold giving Bond-style ambience to Burning In Flames. Despite one-time Rudimental leader Amir Amor's rather flat production and the dearth of all-out tub-thumpers beyond the wry The Lads, they've transformed themselves into a differently beguiling proposition.

John Aizlewood

Cast

★★★★

Love Is The Call

CAST RECORDINGS. CD/DL/LP

Follow-up to 2017's *Kicking Up The Dust*. "A cosmic call to arms," says John Power.

This seventh album sees John Power return to his first instrument, the bass, which he last played in The La's. He says he was prompted to do so because *Love Is The Call* was written to operate in the space between the aforesaid's beloved 1990 eponymous LP and Cast's 1995 debut *All Change*. The results are Brit Invasion melodies, thrusting rockabilly guitars, and lyrics that find hope in seaport-based fantasy and the power of connection. Throughout, Power's vocals retain their lovable keen and Youth's production is uncluttered and crisp (it was put down quick in his Space Mountain studio in Spain). High points are the heraldic Forever And A Day and Rain That Falls. But Bluebird, a haunting ballad with just Power on acoustic guitar, is affecting too.

Lois Wilson

David Nance & Mowed Sound

★★★★

David Nance & Mowed Sound

THIRD MAN. DL/LP/MC

Garage rocker finds spiritual home at Jack White's label.

As someone who released his own version of *Beatles For Sale* with "These guys STINK" scrawled across the Fabs photo on the cover, you'd be forgiven for thinking Omaha's David Nance has a pretty punchy take on rock history. In fact, his wiry garage rock is inventive rather than iconoclastic, with full, raw covers of *Goat's Head Soup*, *Berlin* and *Doug Sahm And Band* also nestling in his digital catalogue. This first 'proper' LP since 2020's fine *Staunch Honey* is generally more of the same, even with a backing band replacing his regular solo, multi-tracked approach. Hence Mock The Hours picks up where *Staunch Honey*'s Merchandise left off, roughly like *Exile On Main St.* had it been conceived at peak CBGB. Nance says "most of these songs were written as country songs and then perverted into different forms", and those roots are most exposed on the lovely Tumbleweed and In Orlando. Generally, though, he covers his tracks brilliantly: classic songwriting creatively re-imagined in pulsating, droning, rackety new environs.

John Mulvey

KillerStar

★★★★

KillerStar

HIGHWIRE. CD/DL/LP

Debut from London duo and revered friends of Bowie.

Named mostly after a David Bowie song (*Reality*'s New Killer Star), featuring a host of Bowie alumni (notably Mike Garson, Earl Slick and Gail Ann Dorsey) and sounding a little like assorted eras Bowie, the ghost of one man hovers benignly over KillerStar. Songwriter/singer Rob Fleming and seriously moonlighting drum tutor James Sedge have their facsimile moments, such as Should've Known Better's appropriation of the Absolute Beginners hook and Got Me All Wrong's art-stomp, but when they go their own way and the Bowie alumni kick hard, KillerStar are a less contrived proposition entirely. The standout Go (Hold On Tight) moves in slinky fashion before unfurling a gigantic, irresistible chorus; You're A Chameleon channels Suede and the closing Falling Through takes almost seven minutes to tell its beguiling tale, as Donny McCaslin's saxophone wails appealingly in the background. There's more to come here, hopefully.

John Aizlewood

The Libertines

★★★★

All Quiet On The Eastern Esplanade

EMI. CD/DL/LP

The troubled millennial heroes pull themselves together for a fourth album.

Anthems For Doomed Youth, The Libertines' first reunion LP in 2015, cast Pete'n'Carl as condemned soldier-poets beneath a tattered Union flag. *All Quiet…*'s punning WW1 title suggests more of the same, but instead it largely side lines nostalgic tales of old Albion in favour of songs populated with dealers, migrants and young mothers in Juicy Couture track suits – reflective, no doubt, of the band's edgy new Margate base. Completing the reboot, *All Quiet* sounds distinctly unlike any previous Libs LP, go-to producer Dimitri Tikovoï beefing up the ensemble group playing with Thunder Thighs-style BVs (the Stones-y Mustang) and even flowing strings and synths (Merry Old England). Thankfully, Doherty's songwriting rises to the occasion, especially on Shiver and Baron's Claw, while Barât provides welcome punk zip with Run Run Run and the marvellous Oh Shit. Quite a result, all things considered.

Pat Gilbert

Pete Astor

★★★

Tall Stories & New Religions

TAPETE. CD/DL/LP

Almost respayed: Loft man fixes his back catalogue.

Marking 40 years since the release of Peter Astor's first record – The Loft's Why Does The Rain? single – this collection gives an autumn-years overhaul to some of the bookish auteur's old songs with his array of former bands: The Weather Prophets, Wisdom Of Harry, Ellis Island Sound et al. The charity shop cardigan feel of She Comes From The Rain is traded in for Bryan Ferry-esque tailoring on a revised version, neglected Emblem gets a new twinkle, while third-age Bob Dylan winks through Astor's retakes of one-chord wonder Chinese Cadillac and faux-Appalachian doodle Nancy True Knot. Astor never had the cachet of fellow travellers The Go-Betweens or Lloyd Cole, but Model Village underlines his continued craftiness. Still one of the coolest boys in the lending library.

Jim Wirth

Terrace anthems: Yard Act's James Smith (centre) turns the lens on himself.

Idyll rich

Leeds chroniclers' follow-up to *The Overload*; proving that sometimes, more is more. By Andrew Perry.

Yard Act

★★★★

Where's My Utopia?

ISLAND. CD/DL/LP/MC

IT'S BARELY two years since Yard Act's debut album, prophetically entitled *The Overload*, announced the Leeds-born quartet as one of the most exciting UK indie rock combo in years. At home, it charted at Number 1, but such are the rigours of self-promotion these days that commercially ambitious artists have to make themselves harder to avoid than ever before in pop history – and these early-thirtysomethings worked the social-media blitzkrieg hard. Consequently, it may feel rather early for Round Two.

The good news is that, with *Where's My Utopia?*, James Smith's crew have channelled 2022-23's affirmation into a confident and substantial evolution of their sound.

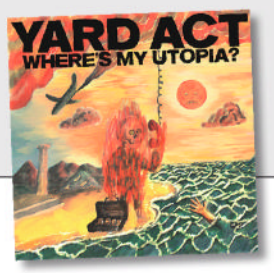
For all its playful foundation in loops, *The Overload* was still inescapably Fall-esque, garnished with another Smith's withering Northern brogue. This time, Yard Act are operating way beyond indie-schmindie post-punk, signposted by their enlistment of co-producer Remi Kabaka Jr, AKA Damon Albarn's latterday sidekick in Gorillaz.

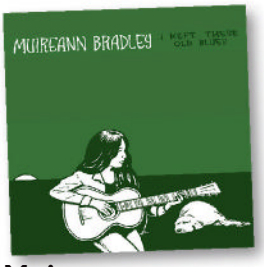
Again assembled by bassist/MD Ryan Needham, this record's blizzard of vocal snippets, borrowed riffs and beats evokes a spirit of sampledelic liberation reminiscent of early hip-hop's light-fingered glee, of Saint Etienne (see Katy J Pearson's silky bubblegum chorus on When The Laughter Stops) and, in its recurrent lope, Beck's *Odelay*.

In the album's early stages, Smith, a new father, forgoes *The Overload*'s scathing character studies to turn the lens on himself. The album's title implies the complex problems arising from success, and in second track We Make Hits, he digs deep, ultimately to celebrate the band's big-tune-building *raison d'être*, also pleading "we're on the same wage" while contracted to "a subsidiary of Universal, Inc". The corporate budget, however, affords luxuries like choirs, orchestral flurries and the odd stentorian thespian voiceover.

Smith's lyrical self-examination continues on moody Down By The Stream, where, like My Name Is Earl set to a barrelling hip-hop groove, he apologises for bullying a peer at school. At 0:47 on fourth track The Undertow, though, the album's party starts in earnest, as a Daft Punk disco beat kicks in, leading to the Pulp-esque chorus, "What's the guilt worth, if you do nothing with it?" The bubbly, glitterball hijinx roll on into Dream Job (more musings on YA's workplace – "step into my office, all night long") until penultimate Blackpool Illuminations, where Smith reflects on a childhood trauma from the psychoanalyst's couch alongside amusingly Afrobeat-tinged muzak.

The soul-mining feels sincere, and Yard Act's skill – very like Mike Skinner's The Streets – is to turn that detailed narrative into great pop music, bursting with pop-cultural references and positive messaging. In finale, A Vineyard For The North, their frontman's glass-half-full logic gives thanks for his career upturn, plus a by-product of climate change whereby wine may soon be produced in Yorkshire – a fittingly upbeat outcome from a band still on an unstoppable roll.





Muireann Bradley

★★★★

I Kept These Old Blues

TOMPKINS SQUARE. CD/DL/LP

American guitar classics revisited and refreshed.

Gary Davis's Candyman, John Hurt's Stagolee and Richland Woman Blues, Sam McGee's Buck Dancer's Choice, Libba Cotton's Freight Train and Shake Sugaree – these ageless melodies are among the masterworks of American vernacular guitar, and it's a bold player who takes them on. Any doubts about Muireann Bradley's qualifications for the job are quickly dispelled. Within minutes the listener will be marvelling at her command of the ringing harmonics and cascading figures of Blind Blake's Police Dog Blues, or the intricate patterns of Hurt's Frankie. Yes, these are familiar pieces, but seldom have they been executed with the verve and grace, as well as the skill, of this young Irishwoman – who also brings to them a quiet, unmannered voice, crystalline and true.

Tony Russell

Legendary Singing Stars

★★★★

Good Old Way

MUSIC MAKER FOUNDATION. CD/DL/LP

Remarkable 2022 live album from the gospel pioneers.

New York's Legendary Singing Stars started in 1960 as the Five Singing Stars with their early singles coming out on Peacock then HOB, HSE and Malaco. While these records only reached a niche audience, their gospel stomp sells out Carnegie Hall and Madison Square Garden. This album captures them in 2022 at the Telluride Blues And Brews Festival in Colorado. Recorded on a couple of mikes hung high in the trees near the stage, it's a revelation, with their 84-year-old lead singer Billie Hardie's gravelly vocal chops, steeped in soul and country, over the band's hypnotic rhythms – think Pop Staples' uncluttered funk blues – shaking the foundations. There are excitable whoops and squeals from the crowd, and at one point a baby is even passed up onto the stage to be blessed.

Lois Wilson

Mary Timony

★★★

Untame The Tiger

MERGE. CD/DL/LP

DC punk guitar hero (Autoclave, Helium, Ex Hex) has some thinking to do.

Mary Timony's fifth solo outing is a break-up album. Really, though, it's a processing a break-up album. She eschews specific sins and slings in favour of approaching their aftershocks. And while natural elements run wild in these lyrics, for every river, sun, and pile of leaves, there's a brain, a mind, and unresolved dreams. Timony adds dashes of '60s sounds to her guitars – a 12-string here, a slide there, even a sitar-y touch. (Fairport Convention's Dave Mattacks drums on more than half the tracks.) But the melancholy feels more goth than hippy and, ultimately, both the sounds and lyrics feel unresolved. "I wanna know what I don't know now," she says at one point; "I tried so hard to know," she sings elsewhere. By the end we're left – unsatisfactorily and oh so accurately – feeling that some things just aren't knowable.

Chris Nelson

Aziza Brahim

★★★★

Mawja

GLITTERBEAT. CD/DL/LP

Clash-influenced fifth from the Saharwai singer.

A Spanish colony until 1975, Western Sahara was then fought over by Mauritania and Morocco (the latter now governs 90 per cent of the country, despite the protests of exiled nationalists). Forced from her homeland and a veteran of refugee camps, Brahim has every right to sing the desert blues, but this is a more rounded affair than that tag suggests, perfect for taking her concerns to the radios of the world. Mental health issues, aggravated by lockdown, resulted in time spent listening to The Clash and using them to spark the songs here – it's not obvious, but among the elements leaving an impression are Brahim's vibrato on Haiyu Ya Zuwar, the flamenco guitar (played on a Cuban tres), the layers of desert flutes (on Fuadi) and a production that shimmers with Saharan heat. *Mawja* may not rock the casbah, but it should seduce it.

David Hutcheon

James Mastro

★★★

Dawn Of A New Error

MPRESS. CD/DL

New Jersey singer/songwriter and Ian Hunter's guitarist's debut solo album.

As a former member of Hoboken '80s powerpop band The Bongos and a sideman for Patti Smith and Southside Johnny, James Mastro distils several decades of studio and road experience into this collection. His current musical partner, Ian Hunter, adds backing vocals to Right Words, Wrong Song, which would have slotted right into Hunter's recent *Defiance Part 1* LP. While *Dawn Of A New Error* isn't reinventing the wheel (think: standard rock, pop and Americana), Mastro's writing chops and lived-in voice carry everything, from the punchy Three Words through to the more reflective My God and the lyrically bleak Never Die. "You think you own the world but you're not that clever," he declares on River Runs Forever, one of many songs marked by a stoic self-awareness and willingness to address life's mistakes. For so long in the shadows, Mastro deserves his turn in the spotlight.

Mark Blake

Joel Ross

★★★★

Nublues

BLUE NOTE. CD/DL/LP

Ballads and blues from one of the great small groups in jazz.

THE VIBRAPHONE has never ranked among the sexy instruments. No fan ever played air vibes. But if anyone can wrest emotion from the cold aluminium bars it's the Chicago-born hotshot now releasing his fourth album for Blue Note. On a record inspired by Joel Ross's recent study of the blues, his dancing mallets add a silvery shimmering haze to seven originals, a free flowing Thelonious Monk cover (Evidence) and two John Coltrane tunes (Equinox; Central Park West). The soulful side of Coltrane is another key influence here, principally in the alto-saxophone explorations of the excellent Immanuel Wilkins, while Jeremy Corren adds meditative, gospel-tinged piano. The music moves seamlessly from Ross's melodic, accessible themes to improvisations that are adventurous but never self-indulgent. It's early days, but this cool and stylish record should make the jazz best-of-year lists.

John Bungey

Sound of metal: Joel Ross wrests emotion from his vibraphone.

Dion

★★★

Girl Friends

KTBA. CD/DL

Lively duets album featuring female blues vanguard.

In her sleevenotes to *Girl Friends*, Darlene Love equates Dion to the protagonist in The Crystals' outsider anthem He's A Rebel, and at 84 he still has a touch of the charismatic bad boy about him. *Girl Friends*, like 2020's *Blues With Friends* and 2021's *Stomping Ground*, draws on his deep love of the blues and features an abundance of guests. This time round he's duetting with "the women who inhabit my headphones". These include Susan Tedeschi, Joanne Shaw Taylor and Rory Block, who all deliver satisfying, straight-down-the-line blues rockers. But it's the tracks that mix it up a bit that appeal most. Such as Mama Said, which captures Dion in a fiery call and response with Shemekia Copeland, and Stop Drop And Roll with Valerie Tyson, all field holler and gospel stomp.

Lois Wilson

Bruce Bennett

Down by the river

Big Thief singer gets it together in the country for fourth solo album. By Victoria Segal.

Adrianne Lenker

★★★★

Bright Future

4AD. CD/DL/LP/MC

Future facing: heartbreak is around every corner on Big Thief's Adrianne Lenker's latest solo LP.

"DO YOU wanna go to the river?" asks Adrianne Lenker on Free Treasure, a mind-body tussle in the middle of *Bright Future*. "I know this spot so deep and green/With wild raspberries and apple trees/And rocks to climb between." It's an invitation in keeping with the Big Thief singer's musical MO: spontaneous, a little wild, promising soulful nourishment. Even though they formed in Brooklyn, a nature-child narrative has formed around Big Thief, their music as pure as an upstate creek, their commune vibe generating an old-school, vegetable-dyed-in-the-wool hippy aura.

Bright Future comes with another escape-to-the-country backstory, Lenker uniting producer Philip Weinrobe and musicians Mat Davidson, Nick Hakim and Josefin Runsteen to play piano, guitar, violin and percussion in a woodland studio during the autumn of 2022. The results have the in-the-room intimacy of Lenker's best work; there are moments after the count-in to Already Lost's wool-winding roll, or during Bon Iver-style environmental lament Donut Seam, where you wouldn't be surprised to hear somebody getting to their feet to throw more wood on the fire and ask who wants another cup of nettle tea.

As a result, it's tempting to imagine the songs Lenker writes – often, as on 2020's hazier *Songs And Instrumentals*, at improvisational speed – are simply gathered, foraged, pressed out like water from moss. Opening track Real House goes panning through memories of childhood, just the rush of air and a translucent piano between Lenker and her thoughts about her mother, home, security (warning: the dog dies).

Yet there is a hardness – in every sense – to Lenker's writing. It doesn't flow cleanly – it catches in currents, snags in overhanging branches, goes under and pulls itself up again. Heartbreak is around every bend. Sometimes it's resilient, defiant: Sadness As A Gift is a fuller country collaboration, a green shoot off Love Minus Zero/No Limit, while the original version of Big Thief's 2023 single Vampire Empire is lusty, distorted and furious ("I walked into your dagger for the last time in a row"), as if it were shaken out of the same envelope that hid Lou Reed's 1965 demos for decades.

There are more vulnerable moments, yet the Karen O-like Ruined could be a Show Me Heaven-style blockbuster in another world thanks to Lenker's melodic gifts, while the half-lit Swan Swan H of Evol reverses words ("Kiss spells ssik") to express the slipperiness of love, its treacherous language. "Just when I think I couldn't feel more/I feel a little more," Lenker sings on Free Treasure, something that barely seems possible – desirable even – in the face of this raw, unshelled music. Lenker and her band, though, never lose control of these songs: the balance is precise, the guiding hand steady. It's safe to follow Lenker down to the river, down to the rocks – she never gets lost.

Itasca

★★★★

Imitation Of War

PARADISE OF BACHELORS. CD/DL/LP

The Gun Outfit collaborator softly stuns with her best album yet.

"My prayer is tired," sings Itasca leader Kayla Cohen late into Tears On Sky Mountain, her honeyed tone rising like first light, "but my rosary is long." Indeed, *Imitation Of War*, the first Itasca LP in five years, gently overflows with all manners of worry: hope that lingers like a head cold, grief that demands your whole mind, conflict that leaves you quarrelling with yourself. But Cohen and her modest band light small fires beneath these poetic dispatches – suffused with pinpoint images of prairie, sky, and mountain and multivalent invocations of mythology – and let them burn away, the rising ash doubling as falling snow. Cohen's voice moves like a vintage guitar with a responsive whammy bar, conveying emotional nuance through every shift. And speaking of guitars, this should be Cohen's coming-out party as one of the form's most stunning instrumentalists, a child of Garcia, Verlaine, and electric Mitchell who absolutely stuns on Easy Spirit. A gently breath-taking wonder.

Grayson Haver Currin

Waxahatchee

★★★★

Tigers Blood

ANTI-. CD/DL/LP

A strong but slow-burning follow-up to 2020 breakthrough *Saint Cloud*.

"My spine's a rotted two by four," sings Waxahatchee, AKA Katie Crutchfield, on Bored. More than its choice, but fairly minimalist alt-country arrangements, it's Crutchfield's nimble lyrical voice that distinguishes *Tigers Blood*, its 12 songs exploring friendships diverging at the crossroads and the anchoring, centring effects of her ongoing sobriety. With its measured banjo pecks and perfect shadow bv's, courtesy of rising Southern rock talent MJ Lenderman, Right Back To It's simple classicism seems to explore over-sensitivity, while Crowbar, possessed of a lovely, Peter Buck-ish jangle, also stands out. Amid the sophisticated shuffle groove of Lone Star Lake, the acrobatic scansion of Crutchfield's self-analysis peaks. "In the drunkiness of free reign/I'm an outlaw in the court of strong opinions," she sings. We've all been there, but which of us has expressed it so well?

James McNair

Katherine Priddy

★★★★

The Pendulum Swing

COOKING VINYL. CD/DL/LP

Striking follow-up to 2021's *The Eternal Rocks Beneath*.

Priddy's first EP won acclaim from Richard Thompson; her first album earned glowing reviews. Her third is simply brilliant, though there's nothing 'simple' about it besides the ease with which it gets under your skin. Musically it feels deeper, more complex, with wonderful arrangements – rural, filmic, even psychedelic in that '60s British way – all held together by the clarity of Priddy's pure strong voice. She still has that haunted folk nostalgia, but here it takes place within the walls of her old childhood home (First House On The Left) that inspired the album. Its 10 full songs are bookended by two small atmospheric tracks, Returning and Leaving, adding to the effect that you're stepping into a world of its own, like a novel or a dream. An intimate beauty, from the hypnotic Selah to Ready To Go, co-written and sung with bandmate George Boomsma.

Sylvie Simmons

Nils Frahm

★★★★

Day

LEITER. DL/LP

Piano Day founder forgoes recent ambient excursions for a turn on the ivories.

Last heard exploring languid airy drones and tantric ambience on 2022's three-hour, piano-free *Music For Animals*, German composer Nils Frahm returns to brass tacks here. Eschewing its predecessor's proggy dimensions, *Day*'s six meditative songs each hover around the six-minute mark, the wintery high notes and glacially spaced ruminations of Tuesdays matched by the measured stillness and solitude of Hands On. While the rising arpeggios of Butter Notes and prepared piano of Changes are more probing and upfront, Towards Zero's lightly pealing refractions divine warmth from echoed repetitions. As with 2011's muted breakthrough *Felt*, *Day* is so intimately recorded it captures his instrument's every creak and squeak, the muffled barking of nearby dogs, even Frahm's breathing. Like Budd or Satie, it's an insular experience whose simplicity is affecting, tenderness innate.

Andy Cowan

Buck Meek

FILTER ALBUMS EXTRA

Champagne Dub
★★★★
Rainbow

ON THE CORNER. CD/DL/LP

On-U Sound and Lee 'Scratch' Perry's experimental spirit are present in this mystic psych four-way between Comet Is Coming's Betamax, Ruth Goller, Ed Briggs and Mr Noodles. Full of eerie clatters and echoed dread, its ghostly transmissions offset by bright electronics and some Pablo-like melodica. *AC*

Coco
★★★
2

FIRST CITY ARTISTS. DL/LP

A second LP of mysterioso pop from the NY trio of Dirty Projectors, Lucius and Pavo Pavo alumni. And if that suggests so many missing vowels and edgy haircuts, then this has far more affinity with Talk Talk's flickering candlelit melancholy or Karen Carpenter's calming contralto on standout Cora Lu. *JB*

Dina Ögon
★★★★
Orion

PLAYGROUND MUSIC. DL/LP

Swedish quartet's third LP refurbishes old soul, jazz and funk tropes with '70s songwriting sensibilities, Anna Ahnlund's glacial vocals offsetting Jag Vill Ha Allt's yearning sophisti-pop, Håll Avstånd's sitar-laced lounge manoeuvres and Det Läcker's rollneck club funk. Seamlessly done and eminently tasteful. *AC*

Gerycz Powers Rolin
★★★★
Activator

12XU. DL/LP

Exceptional freeform jams from a drums/dulcimer/guitar trio out of Ohio, with a growing reputation. A mix of avant-folk roots, improv chops and post-rock epiphanies put them in a continuum through John Fahey, Sandy Bull, Jack Rose and beyond. *JM*

The Hanging Stars
★★★★
On A Golden Shore

LOOSE MUSIC. CD/DL/LP

Londoners' fifth LP of glowing, cosmic UK Americana. A set of epic soundtracks for interior landscapes, conjuring kindred spirits Teenage Fanclub in Sweet Light's gilded guitars; and the Velvets in pedal-steel and brass with Heart In A Box's endearing blend of wonder and anxiety. *JB*

HJirok
★★★★
HJirok

ALTIN VILLAGE & MINE. DL/LP

A mythical entity created to decry an oppressive regime, HJirok's eight long tracks creep slowly into being. While Mouse On Mars' Andi Toma infuses age-old sufi rhythms with setars, processed electronics and field recordings, Kurdish singer Hani Mojtahedy's emotive melodies ring clear as a warning bell. *AC*

Shay Hazan
★★★★
Wusul لوصو

BATOV. DL/LP

Tel Aviv bassist's second LP traverses Moroccan Gnawa, hip-hop, spiritual jazz and points in-between. Hazan's inimitably funky low-end underpins a tribute to Tony Allen (Oladip), chiming krakebs (Vibe Jaded) and ballads (Yarabi), peaking on horn-laced Sunflowers. An artful and enchanting meld. *AC*

Modern English
★★★★
1 2 3 4

MESH & LACE RECORDINGS. CD/DL

Essex quartet rightfully claim elder statesmanship on shrewd opener Long In The Tooth ("I know something that you don't know"). The cold clang of post-punk guitars and synths sounds very 'now', but the veteran 4AD band bring a depth and worldliness to these songs that sets them apart. *JB*

Laena Myers
★★★
Luv (Songs Of Yesterday)

TAXI GAUCHE. CD/DL

A go-to session violinist in Los Angeles and singer of the band FEELS (also the daughter of Devo drummer Alan), Myers' solo debut feels full to the brim, with experience, ideas and detached cool on standouts like the sawing Pulsar or the Patti Smith prowl of Give 'Em Hell. *JB*

Jowee BasH! Omicil
★★★★
Spiritual Healing: Bwa Kayiman Freedom Suite

BASH VILLAGE. CD/DL/LP

A jazz improv invoking the Haitian Revolution, Omicil's cries and pipes (sax, clarinet, piccolo flute) are balanced by Yoann Danier's percussion and Randy Kerber's lonesome keys. It twists, it turns, but never settles. *AC*

EXTENDED PLAY

House Band
Aventurine

Apt, perhaps, that in the month a sensational archive recording by Damo-era Can drops (*see page 94*), this debut album by a similarly-minded new band from LA also arrives. The limber, fully-improvised grooves that fill *Aventurine* – a type of quartz that's the "luckiest of all crystals", apparently – certainly sound informed by deep listens to *Ege Bamyasi*. But there's plenty of other stuff going on, too: disorienting tweaks echoing Teo Macero and Lee Perry's production aesthetics; a sort of funk-adjacent post-rock that lovers of Tortoise's *TNT* will dig. House Band's Google-unfriendly name flags up the project's elusive spirit, and at the moment you'll only be able to find it on streaming platforms. Linchpins Brian Harding and Jason Abraham Roberts used to back Daniel Johnston, and while they're joined by shadowy session guys with Norah Jones on their CVs, it's psychedelic energy rather than staunch virtuosity that dominates here. *Aventurine*'s standout jam is called I Saw House Band In Hollywood: if only that, personally speaking, were true…

John Mulvey

Crystal daze: House Band get funk-adjacent.

Patrick Sansone
★★★★
Infinity Mirrors

CENTRIPETAL FORCE. DL/LP/MC

Pat Sansone's extra-curricular activities away from Wilco usually tend towards powerpop in The Autumn Defense, but here he ventures into deep space ambience. A masterclass in retro-kosmische, and a neat showcase for Sansone's enviable collection of vintage synths. *JM*

Valee & MVW
★★★
Valeedation

FAKE SHORE DRIVE. DL

A weird but effective mix of trap-style rap and avant-classical music. Michael Vincent 'MVW' Waller is a composer and former student of La Monte Young, adding Satie-esque piano lines and production murk to Chicago rhymer Valee's pensées on Taylor Swift and Nelly Furtado. *JM*

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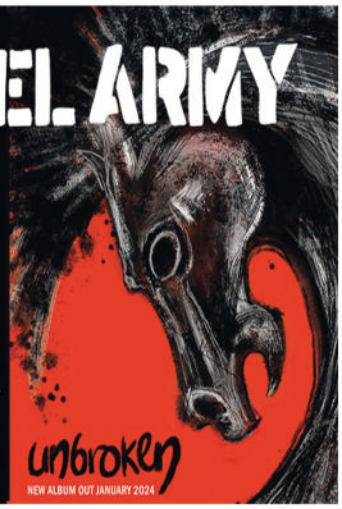

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PHOTO CREDIT LAWRENCE WATSON

Paris, trance

Volume *vier* in the live chronicles of Cologne's mythic improvising superpower – actually playing their songs? Hold tight! says **Ian Harrison**.

Can

★★★★

Live In Paris 1973

SPOON. CD/DL/LP

CAN DRUMMER Jaki Liebezeit left the planet in 2017, but in 2020 his pal and collaborator Jono Podmore compiled rhythmic biography The Life, Theory And Practice Of A Master Drummer. It's a book packed with curiosities. These range from a decoding of Liebezeit's esoteric 'dot-dash' percussion thesis to his instrument collection (he treasured his father's old accordion), as well as the repertoire of facial expressions he favoured for photo shoots, with "visionary gaze into the distance" in pole position. It also details his thoughts on the problem of ego, arguing that, "it holds us tight, it dictates the illusion of the self… when you get rid of it, that is where it all begins."

As this ongoing archival project re-states, Can seemed particularly able to renounce such psychic bonds when in the live arena. Drawn from the audio stash of late collector Andy Hall – who nobly made his earliest recordings with a tape recorder stuck down his trousers – previous volumes in the series presented long-form, all-instrumental murmurations in Brighton and Stuttgart in 1975 and a shorter, punchier groove-based show from Cuxhaven a year later. All are indispensable for Can junkies, allowing those who never got to witness them in the flesh a chance to experience their in-the-moment creative spontaneity, with the type of sonic upgrade and judicious enhancement that hissy old bootleg recordings do not have.

This latest volume, captured at L'Olympia in Paris on Saturday, May 12, 1973, is a long-time favourite among tape aficionados and also the most astonishing of the series so far. At the time, Can were firing creatively and commercially: febrile TV theme Spoon had been a massive hit in West Germany a year earlier, allowing them to move to their fabled studio and chamber of mysteries Inner Space, outside Cologne. The mesmeric funk totalities of *Ege Bamyasi*, a refinement and distillation of ground hinted at on 1971's *Tago Mago*, soon followed. This was one of the great formations in Can's history, with frontman Damo Suzuki a kind of meditative Tasmanian devil, who screamed and whispered in a rhythmic wordless argot he memorably called "the language of the Stone Age".

It's worth noting that Can's studio modus had been to extemporise freely and lengthily and then to edit and structure the raw material into recognisable pieces. The other live albums found them imposing order, high-wire style, at the moment of creation. Though the five tracks presented here are given baldly numeric titles, with this performance we have the unfamiliar and bizarre situation of several of them being recognisable songs, played more or less as they were written – a special kind of heresy for a group who never played the same thing twice.

"As this time-portal demonstrates, their potency as a power force, ideal and totem endures and will endure."

Of course, they're still striking out into the unknown, blindfolded. Opening piece Paris Eins 73, weighing in at a mere 36 minutes, hints at the oncoming storm with initial tremors. As guitarist Michael Karoli picks out gothic filigrees and bassist Holger Czukay plays one note repeatedly, Liebezeit is soon turning up the cold velocity: to Irmin Schmidt's church organ drones and odd mid-air whirlpools conjured from his Alpha 77 synth, Suzuki engages in urgent conversation with himself and the music, clad, no doubt, in future-facing bellbottoms. Soon a baggy lope with Wagnerian fuzz guitars, the sweaty feverishness of *Ege Bamyasi* is palpable as the bass line and beats from Vitamin C and the discordant plink plonking of One More Night make fleeting appearances. No one seems to care what anyone else is doing, so how does it arrive at such order, as when it shifts into a near-bubble-gum boogie rock ascension? Is voice-percussionist Damo Suzuki singing, as it seems he is, "we're spinning on the down when it's lean in the steam?" Before you can ask, the head-nodding reaches its apex and comes to a leviathan, Germano-funk pause, with a clipped Liebezeit variation on the Amen Break and Michael Karoli in country twanging mood. "Well you hang out with a silly guy you chew the bow and your ears turn…" insists Suzuki, maybe: the crowd lose it after the everything-at-once climax as if it's the last song.

For many groups, such a vitals-sapping performance would be, but back in '73 we're off into a kicking nine-minute version of *Ege Bamyasi*'s One More Night, where the whole group descend on one point in space and laser onto it, achieving zero gravity as Karoli seems to play the blues on an egg slicer and Schmidt plays helium organ. It falls apart like a jellyfish on land towards the end, becoming spectral as Czukay's bass flows. The manipulation of space and time continues with a clap-along version of Spoon previously enjoyed on 2011's *The Lost Tapes* box set. They're working within structure but there's still extemporising: after the song starts gathering grit and discord, everyone fixatedly accelerates, each element dovetailing into a repetitive, non-Euclidean one-ness to the point of near-nausea.

Anyone feeling queasy will have to hold on tight as howling, punishing track four pre-empts the helicopters, napalm and delirium of the opening sequence of 'Nam movie classic Apocalypse Now. If Damo Suzuki does sing in the language of the Stone Age, here is where Can raise their titanic menhirs and lay out their solar temple for the prehistoric spacemen to navigate by. Freak-out heavy it may be, but it still floats above the ground. It's almost a relief to get to a relatively straight version of Vitamin C, though this too becomes a monster pummelling your brain and body before ending with insouciant abruptness.

Of course, it couldn't last. Their next album was the ambient relaxant *Future Days* in August '73: a month later Suzuki said he was leaving (see Back Story). Can existed in physical form for another six years, though as this time-portal demonstrates, their potency as a power force, ideal and totem endures and will endure. Another choice Jaki Liebezeit detail in The Life, Theory And Practice Of A Master Drummer was his idea of using soluble vitamin pills to induce foaming at the mouth during gigs, so everyone would think he was in a trance: if he did this during *Live In Paris 1973*, you'd have totally believed it.

Courtesy of Spoon Records

BACK STORY: GOODBYE DAMO

● "For me, two or three years is quite enough," Damo Suzuki told MOJO. "The band was getting quite famous. I have to give autographs on the street. I really don't like this." "He got crazy, I think," Jaki Liebezeit told us in 2011. "His wife was a Jehovah's Witness and they persuaded him to become one. She told him she doesn't like hippies and he has to become a normal man." "We were sort of shocked when Damo left," Irmin Schmidt said, adding that they'd tried out singers including Tim Hardin and Magic Michael Cousins. "But then we figured out that we four alone could do it as well." "My idea was to use someone who is in the radio," Holger Czukay told us in 2016, "and make him function as he was playing with Can… it is more than weird!"

Let's tago in Paris: Can's Holger Czukay (left) and Damo Suzuki plus (back, right) Jaki Liebezeit, striking out into the unknown.

Horsing about: (from left) Ralph Molina, Billy Talbot, Frank Sampedro and Neil Young in 1975, now expanding *Zuma*.

Neil Young & Crazy Horse

★★★★

Dume

REPRISE. DL/LP

Neil rebuilds *Zuma* as a double album. On vinyl, finally.

THE AGE-OLD TRADITION of Neil Young never releasing quite what you want continues apace in 2024; at time of writing, a confirmed date for his *Archives Volume III* box set remains unknown. Instead, be grateful for this vinyl edition of a 16-track chunk of 2020's *Archives Volume II*. *Dume* is ostensibly a radical expansion of 1975's *Zuma*, Point Dume being the headland next to Zuma Beach near producer David Briggs' house in Malibu, where much of the album was recorded. *Dume* ditches the incongruous CSNY collab Through My Sails from the original *Zuma* tracklisting and replaces it with eight blazing cuts from the sessions. All the songs have now surfaced elsewhere, but often in very different and arguably inferior versions: Ride My Llama and Pocahontas are spectacular electric stomps compared with the acoustic takes on Rust Never Sleeps. Reconfigured, *Dume* becomes less about Young's break-up with Carrie Snodgress and leans harder into his phantasmagorial visions of Aztecs and Incas, prompting a heretical thought: it might actually be better than *Zuma*.

John Mulvey

Xmal Deutschland

★★★★

Early Singles (1981-1982)

SACRED BONES. CD/DL/LP/MC

Early, eerie sounds from German darkwave pioneers.

Running in chronological order, this compilation sheds light on the brief yet prolific period shortly before the collective's take-off – a support slot for Cocteau Twins and, eventually, a deal with 4AD. It starts with alarming synth arpeggios and stabs of guitar on Schwarze Welt, Xmal's debut single, signposting their international success. Though formed in freedom-loving Hamburg, the initially all-female quintet felt like tourists at home, to quote GO4's Jon King. Some tracks, indeed, show more affinity with the British indie scene of the day than Neue Deutsche Welle. With its reggae-powered rhythm and Anja Huwe's exclamatory vocals, bonus track Kälbermarsch hints at *Cut*-era Slits, while the ecstatic cyberpunk goth of Incubus Succubus reveals a kinship with Siouxsie & The Banshees. Still, it's their idiosyncratic B-sides Großstadtindianer, Zu Jung Zu Alt and the second bonus track – a live version of Allein from the *Nosferatu Festival* compilation – that confirm their maverick status.

Irina Shtreis

Henry Diltz/Getty Images

Allen Ginsberg

★★★★

Material Wealth

HEYDAY AGAIN. CD

The Beat father sings; assisted by Dylan, Paul McCartney, Arthur Russell and more.

On this soundtrack to a new coffee table collection from Allen Ginsberg's archives, author Pat Thomas curates recordings of the Beat poet's songs and poems. Despite fame coming from 1950s epics like Howl, Ginsberg was inspired by Bob Dylan to set words to melody. Vocally, he was no Caruso, but his singing and recitations were lively and distinct. Assisted by Dylan, David Amram, Arthur Russell, Lenny Kaye and others, the musicians were as inspired by his work as he was by their talents. He nails political and cultural villains in The Ballad Of The Skeletons and is joined by Philip Glass on keyboards and Paul McCartney on organ, percussion and a crisp electric guitar. And on Hum Bom, Ginsberg energetically recites an alliterative meditation on war, while jazz drummer Elvin Jones mimics the thrilling yet chilling sounds of bombing.

Michael Simmons

Thundercat

★★★★

Apocalypse

NINJA TUNE. CD/DL/LP

Tenth anniversary reissue for bass virtuoso's breakthrough.

While earlier releases confirmed the dizzying chops of this in-demand sessioneer (credits include Kamasi Washington, Mac Miller and Suicidal Tendencies), Stephen Bruner's second full-length showcased his budding songwriting skills. His tempestuous futurist-fusion energy was tempered by downcast soulfulness and glimmers of the yacht rock songcraft that would flower on his sprawling 2007 masterpiece, *Drunk*. The finest songs here balance Bruner's restless muso complexity and his feel for emotive chord changes – the questing, proggy Lotus And The Jondy, and Tron Song, a sublime devotional to his cat set to inscrutable time signatures. His capacity for both daffy playfulness and affecting pathos impresses, too, *Apocalypse* finding space for both Oh Sheit It's X, which infectiously celebrates the rush of MDMA, and a closing suite contemplating death, penned in tribute to late musician friend Austin Peralta. As subsequent LPs would further emphasise, Thundercat contains multitudes.

Stevie Chick

Joe Henderson

★★★★

Power To The People

CRAFT RECORDINGS/ JAZZ DISPENSARY. DL/LP

1969 classic from the tenor sax man, reissued on vinyl for the first time in 50 years.

The titles of Joe Henderson's LPs in the late '60s and early '70s – *Black Is The Colour*; *In Pursuit Of Blackness*; *If You're Not Part Of The Solution…* – suggest an artist tuned in to the political mood of the times. Listening to those records now you also hear a musician in ferment, embracing a new free-flowing intensity that happily incorporated synthesizers, congas, Latin rhythms, and vocals. The best example of Henderson's audacious post-Blue-Note eclecticism is this diverse and delightful set. Featuring Ron Carter on bass, Jack DeJohnette on drums, Mike Lawrence on trumpet, Herbie Hancock playing both acoustic and electric piano, *PTTP* moves from reflective ballads (Black Narcissus; Opus One-Point-Five; Lazy Afternoon) to hyperactive space-jazz (Afro-Centric; the title track) and improvised wildness (Isotope; Foresight And Afterthought), with Henderson's horn always walking a brilliant bright line between order and destruction.

Andrew Male

Martin Carthy

★★★★

Martin Carthy

TOPIC. LP

Foundation Anglo folkie's 1965 debut back on vinyl.

Controversy once raged as to whether Martin Carthy's arrangement of Scarborough Fair from his 1965 debut LP had been lifted for Simon & Garfunkel's rather more commercially successful version, but wounds have long-since healed; as Carthy put it: "It's a fucking folk song, everybody owns it." Nonetheless, "The One With Him Sitting On A Pallet" – back on vinyl as part of Topic's 85th anniversary celebrations – remains a towering example of open-source music. An early folk revival adopter, the Londoner's takes of High Germany, Sovay and The Handsome Cabin Boy were plundered by a generation of trad-minded hep cats, the ex-skiffler's guitar accompaniments as much imitated as his clipped vocal style. New arrivals may find his turn-of-the-'70s work, solo and with Steeleye Span, a little more sexy (his 1972 version of Famous Flower Of Serving Men: grrrrr!), but in terms of influence, this is a monster.

Jim Wirth

Two Tons O' Fun

★★★★

Two Tons O' Fun

SOUTHBOUND. LP

1980 debut from Sylvester's 'girls' who later became The Weather Girls.

Martha Wash and Izora Rhodes Armstead brought grit and intensity to disco, first as Sylvester's backing singers, then as the somewhat forgotten duo Two Tons O' Fun who made two excellent LPs, their first, 1980's self-titled – receiving its first repress on vinyl since its original issue here – and the same year's follow-up *Backatcha*. Working with producer Harvey Fuqua of Moonglows/Motown fame, the pair – like Sylvester – dealt in the fantasy self, exploring notions of identity and inclusivity on their debut's four singles. The first three, Earth Can Be Just Like Heaven, I Got The Feeling and Just Us, are the perfect blend of church-honed raw performance, hi-energy vibrations and pop nous; the fourth, Taking Away Your Space, their stirring rumination featuring Sylvester on keys.

Lois Wilson

Sonic Youth

★★★★

Walls Have Ears

GOOFIN'. CD/DL/LP

Long-lost semi-official bootleg from SY's 1985 UK tours finally gets proper release.

Released without the band's knowledge – and swiftly deleted after they discovered its existence – *Walls Have Ears* is more than just an elusive rarity within the Sonic Youth discography. Chronicling two shows from their first UK tours in 1985, *Walls* captures the group in a volcanic moment of transition, evolving from the artful nihilism of their *Bad Moon Rising* album to the bruising psychedelia of *EVOL*. So we get the blank-eyed mania of I'm Insane, two runs through the chilling Manson Family ecstasies of Death Valley 69, the ambient industrial of Ghost Bitch. We also get an embryonic Expressway To Yr Skull, its beatific drones reaching for enlightenment, and a primal raga reading of Green Light. Presented *verité*-style, dry banter and mangled Madonna tapes masking between-song retuning, *Walls* is an essential slice of art-punk history. It's also a blistering good time.

Stevie Chick

The Children's Hour

★★★

Going Home

SEA NOTE/DRAG CITY. DL/LP

Chicago folk-rock relic from 2001, starring Josephine Foster and Slint's Dave Pajo.

While Pajo toured as guitarist in Billy Corgan's short-lived supergroup Zwan from 2001-2003, he'd moonlight as drummer with support act The Children's Hour, whom he'd chanced upon in small Windy City venues. Today, he describes that involvement as "like putting on a gas mask and getting clean oxygen", aptly marvelling at Foster's crystalline vocal purity, and the guileless idiosyncrasy of her and guitarist Andy Bar's songs. These concurrent eight recordings lay dormant for the intervening 20-plus years awaiting mixing and bass lines which Pajo never got around to finessing. Here belatedly completed, it's obvious why Pajo fell under TCH's spell: Foster's graceful keening exquisitely adorns Bar's twisty-turny strumming, the upbeat tracks (Dance With Me; Anna) reminiscent of Alison Statton's post-Young Marble Giants combo, Weekend. Thereafter, the core couple endured, minus Pajo, long enough to cut 2003's *SOS JFK*, before Foster went it alone, latterly recording prolifically for Fire Records.

Andrew Perry

The Mystic Tide

★★★★

Frustration

NUMERO GROUP. LP

Collected tracks by ferocious New York state garage punks, 1965 to '67.

FROM LONG ISLAND and led by guitarist Joe Docko Jr, The Mystic Tide made agitated, paranoid, garage folk-punk which was never going to chart but should have earned them a bigger following than they had. Formed in high school, they began as The Chosen Few and recorded a couple of Brit Invasion-styled songs. By 1965, having changed their name, they were channelling teen angst through a more aggressive, ominous sound built on space-age riffing and in-the-red treble and distortion. The best example of this is the fuming Frustration from 1967 – a minute of its two and a half minute-duration given over to a frantic guitar break that convulses and squeals. Why and Stay Away, from the previous year, also thrill with their Merseybeat-like wistfulness and sinister surf-noir twang.

Lois Wilson

Rising up: The Mystic Tide made agitated, paranoid, garage folk-punk.

Johnny Lytle

★★★★

People & Love

CRAFT RECORDINGS. LP

Soul-jazz vibes player's cult 1973 album.

From Springfield, Ohio, Lytle (1932-1995) divided his time as a youngster between learning to box and playing the drums. Although he became a successful pugilist, in the late '50s he concentrated on music, playing drums for Ray Charles and Jimmy Witherspoon before switching to the vibraphone. Once described by Lionel Hampton as "the greatest vibes player in the world" because of his lightning-fast melodic runs, Lytle had 15 albums to his name before releasing *People & Love* in 1973. Long out of print, the album finds Lytle combining three progressive original numbers with jazzy covers of recent soul hits: the Donny Hathaway-Roberta Flack gem Where Is The Love? and a wild deconstruction of The Stylistics' People Make The World Go Round. Lytle offers a dizzying display of virtuosity on the tense and funky Tawhid while Libra offers a dreamy spiritual vibe.

Charles Waring

Various

★★★★

Song Keepers: A Music Maker Foundation Anthology

NO DEPRESSION/MMF. CD/DL

Celebrating 30 years of the Music Maker Foundation.

For the last three decades the MMF have been quietly documenting the incredible wealth of underground blues, gospel and folk singers and players coming out of the American South, capturing these should-be-superstars living in poverty, playing live in their sitting rooms, churches and back yards. This 4-CD set is a mere snapshot of their work but it's a vivid one and includes thrilling performances from, among others, Beverly 'Guitar' Watkins, who once performed with Piano Red and played guitar behind her back. Watkins was working as a cleaner and street-busking when MMF came across her; Precious Bryant, an expert Piedmont finger-picker with a voice raw and loud which she used to cannonade injustice; and Neal Pattman, who lost an arm when he was nine and went on to blow slow and moody harmonica.

Lois Wilson

Coley Park

★★★

Devil Tree

BIG POTATO. CD/DL/LP

Country-fried gem from the home counties; co-produced by Slowdive's Neil Halstead.

Coley Park named themselves after a suburb of Reading, but fortunately set their sights higher. As US trade mag The Gavin Report launched the first Americana chart in 1995, a little pocket opened in the town, spearheaded by Neil Halstead who formed Mojave 3 after the demise of shoegazers Slowdive. His friends Nick Holton and Nick Portnell both guested on Mojave 3 records, and when they formed Coley Park, Halstead co-produced this, the quartet's second LP from 2004 (following a 2003 mini-LP) – originally titled *Down At The Devilin' Tree*. Whilst Mojave 3 were as much influenced by Nick Drake as country rock, Coley Park were more trad – slide guitar and banjo lead the way – and willing to let rip, with wah wah guitars (Sleeping Apart), raggedy psychedelic frazzle (Eyes Are Only Water) or sounding more like Wilco on Across The Carpet Stars. One more LP (2007's *Rhinoceros*), and they were gone.

Martin Aston

Various

★★★★

Jon Savage's 1983-1985: Welcome To Techno City

ACE. CD

Punk chronicler and MOJO writer revisits the mid-'80s.

Like all eras, the mid-'80s were a mix of the good, the bad and the indifferent. Splendidly, writer Jon Savage spent most of it selecting which pop videos would be shown on the doomed TV-am. As well as watching, Savage was a reasonably discerning listener too, hence these 30 selections, thwarted only by licensing restrictions and the exclusion of anything with rock or reggae pretensions. As with the best comps, it's a catholic treat and almost every pick is open to debate – here former and future Buzzcock Pete Shelley's drab Telephone Operator, an unappealing moment on the appealing *XL1* LP – but there lies the joy. Alison Moyet's censor-busting Love Resurrection, Art Of Noise's Close (To The Edit) tick the right commercial boxes, but Cameo's Single Life remains a wonder and the extended mix of Psychedelic Furs' Heartbeat is a joy.

John Aizlewood

FILE UNDER...

In full swing: Lindisfarne's Alan Hull in 1969 – his early solo work was intense and chaotic.

Nicely out of Toon

A future star hones his craft across four discs. By Jim Irvin.

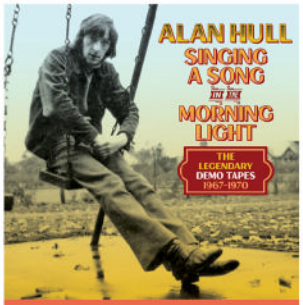
AGED ABOUT 14, Newcastle schoolboy Alan Hull saw two alumni of his school, Rutherford Grammar, suddenly became nationally known as Hank Marvin and Bruce Welch of The Shadows. Inspired, he took up the guitar. In 1965, aged 20, his latest band, The Chosen Few, won a newspaper contest and a deal with Pye Records. Two singles (all four sides written by Hull) showed promise, but the headstrong Geordie refused to compromise when his proposed third single, a protest song called This Land Is Cold, proved too edgy for producer Cyril Stapleton. Rather than let Stapleton water down his work, Hull left the band (who went on to become Skip Bifferty) in around the summer of 1966, when he married Patricia Sharp, a nurse who worked at the St Nicholas Psychiatric Hospital in Gosforth. Pat helped Alan get a job at the facility as a junior nurse. That job and the fascinating characters he met there fired him to write dozens of songs.

The Chosen Few had a young patron, David Wood, who'd acted as a de facto manager. He'd opened his own studio Impulse Sound, above a shuttered night club and in early 1967, Hull went there to record demos of his new material. But he couldn't afford the £25 studio fee. So Wood decided he'd pay him instead. He proposed taking an interest in Hull's publishing for a £10 weekly retainer and free studio time. This liberated Hull to record whenever he wanted, after work or the pub, alone on piano or guitar or with various mates or pick-up bands he knew from the circuit. One of those was a blues outfit who'd restyled themselves, post-Band, as Brethren. Hull and Brethren gigged and recorded together and it became apparent that each made the other shine. Fused together in 1970 as Lindisfarne, they drew on the demos Hull had recorded at Impulse for breakthrough album, *Nicely Out Of Tune*. Among them was big hit single Lady Eleanor and his classic spine-tingler Winter Song. In interviews, Hull spoke frequently of the songs he'd been inspired to write while working in a mental hospital, so they became mythical among fans. A few cropped up as CD bonus tracks but they've not been gathered together until now. *Singing A Song In The Morning Light* (Grapefruit) ★★★★ is a 4-CD collection of 90 recordings from 1967 to 1970 (with excellent notes by David Wells).

Hull's style was intense, clearly indebted to Dylan, Lennon and whatever was happening – bits of early Floyd or Simon & Garfunkel are discernible – and chaotic: his brash, abrasive delivery, thumping the piano and picking busy but proficient acoustic guitar, his voice cracking and breaking, his lyrics sometimes measured, sometimes bursting out of the spaces provided. It's the sound of an energetic young man, fizzing with talent, finding his style, trying on multiple voices (something he'd continue to do in and after Lindisfarne) and revelling in the act of creation.

Remarkably, opener Here I Am feels like something Oasis might have recorded, 30 years early, suggesting a shared sense of a Northern song. Hull's man-of-the-people approach was honed at numerous pub gigs and singalongs. He was a dedicated socialist with a kitchen sink instinct (Where Is My Sixpence), deeply rooted in his hometown (We Can Swing Together), devoted to his family (Picture A Little Girl), his songs are awash with adrenaline, or beer, veering from the mordant and articulate (Overstrung At 3am), through a homespun spirituality (Clear White Light Pt. 2) to the psychedelic, the playful and the bizarre (Scotch Egg Bluebird Pie).

Four discs of this stuff – sourced, it sounds, from cassette tapes – is a lot to absorb, especially if you're not invested in Hull's subsequent work, and it hasn't all aged brilliantly. But if you've ever loved Lindisfarne, *Pipedream* or *Squire*, you're sure to find something here to engage and uplift you.

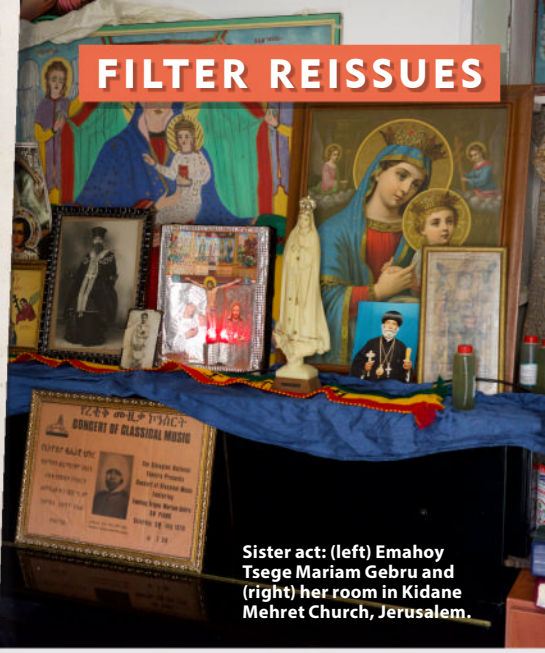


"It's the sound of a young man, fizzing with talent, revelling in the act of creation."

Getty

Force of habit

Home recordings from the Ethiopian nun who became a cult pianist in her eighties. By David Hutcheon.



Sister act: (left) Emahoy Tsege Mariam Gebru and (right) her room in Kidane Mehret Church, Jerusalem.

Emahoy Tsege Mariam Gebru

★★★★

Souvenirs

MISSISSIPPI. CD/DL/LP

HAVING ENTERED an Addis Ababa monastery in 1944, and spent her final 38 years in a convent in Jerusalem, it's doubtful Yewubdar Guèbrou, who died last year, aged 99, would have expected her passing to merit worldwide mourning. That it did was down to the fact that, late in life, she had been discovered to be a virtuoso pianist and composer of unique talent; comparable, in The Guardian's obituary, to Keith Jarrett, Erik Satie, Scott Joplin and Professor Longhair, but with a measure of Bach thrown in and an innate understanding of traditional Ethiopian music and Coptic liturgy.

If you are looking to discover genius in unlikely places, here is one of the 20th century's most deserving candidates. Dating from between 1963 and 1972, the first collection of solo piano recordings by Emahoy Tsege Mariam Gebru (the name she took as a nun) was released as part of the *Éthiopiques* series in 2006 and became a sensation. On the surface – like Satie's – her music is beguilingly simple, but the way it rolls and flows and the unexpected turns it takes allow the listener to lose themselves within.

True, Gebru's artistry could be downplayed – she was dubbed "the honky-tonk nun" in a BBC documentary – but she had been a conservatoire student and turned down London's Royal Academy of Music. You don't write a threnody as moving as The Last Tears Of A Deceased without understanding exactly what you are doing, and it's tantalising to speculate on what she may have achieved had her calling not been to serve God.

By her own choice, Gebru received not a penny from her music, which was initially sold only to raise funds for charity. A second, eponymous, compilation arrived on Mississippi Records in 2016, with her rare 1972 LP *Hymn Of Jerusalem* (as *Jerusalem*) following in 2023. That reissue also included home recordings that had been available – at the wrong speed – on a CD sold in the gift shop at the monastery to which Gebru had moved to escape the authoritarian government at home.

At last, the final instalments in a small but extraordinary legacy receive the respect she and they deserve. This fourth release further mines the home tapes but introduces Gebru's singing voice and yet another layer of uncanny eeriness. Though recorded in Addis Ababa in 1977-85, songs such as Ready To Leave and Don't Forget Your Country are laments from her future life. "When I looked out past the clouds, I couldn't see my country's sky," she sings (in Amharic) on Is It Sunny Or Cloudy In The Land You Live?. "Have I really gone so far?" Gebru could hardly have imagined just how far these eight songs would end up going. Haunting and unforgettable.

Cal Tjader

★★★★

Catch The Groove: Live At The Penthouse 1963-1967

JAZZ DETECTIVE/ELEMENTAL. CD/DL/LP

A cache of unreleased live recordings by vibraphone-playing Latin jazz icon.

As a St Louis-born descendant of Swedish immigrants, Tjader was Latin jazz's unlikeliest hero. He first took to the stage as a tap-dancing child star in his parents' vaudeville act but by his teens was turning heads with his jazz drumming. In 1949, during a spell with Dave Brubeck's band, Tjader switched to the vibraphone; in the early '50s, he went solo and quickly became a surprise star of the US mambo scene with his exciting fusion of cool jazz and sizzling Afro-Cuban syncopations. This 2-CD collection captures Tjader in his prime; alongside simpatico sidemen including pianist Clare Fischer and Havana conguero Armando Peraza, his glistening vibes shimmer across a blend of pulsating Latin grooves, delicately luminous ballads, and jazz standards rendered with a tasteful authority. With its finely tuned balance of dazzling virtuosity and nuanced sensitivity, *Catch The Groove* is a wonderful reminder of Tjader's trailblazing genius.

Charles Waring

West Coast Consortium

★★★

All The Love In The World, Complete Recordings 1964-1972

GRAPEFRUIT. CD

Everything by ill-fated, misleadingly named Londoners.

Since they hailed from north London, West Coast Consortium were rather cynically named, but by 1969, when they had their only hit – the pert Number 22, All The Love In The World – they had already shortened themselves to Consortium and the dumper was beginning to beckon. Signed to major label Pye as X-IT – and then re-christened by production and songwriting hit machine Tony Macauley – their blend of sweet harmonies, crisp pop, Robbie Fair's plaintive vocals and, on Colour Sergeant Lillywhite amongst others, edgier hints of psychedelia, they were a safe bet. Yet they didn't manage to release an album during their shambolic career. The sleevenotes vaguely cite "outside influences" as the cause of WCC's demise, but these three sparkling discs, mostly comprising albums which never made it past the acetate stage, suggest someone missed a trick somewhere along the line.

John Aizlewood

Danielle Boutet

★★★★

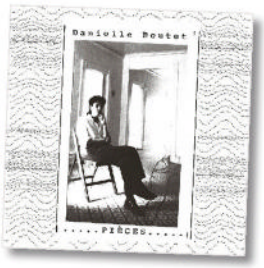
Pièces

FREEDOM TO SPEND. DL/LP

First vinyl pressing for 1985 home-recording by classically-trained Quebecois experimentalist.

It was in 2018, whilst perusing a mid-'80s catalogue from now-defunct North Carolina-based feminist music distributor Ladyslipper, that FTS label-co-owner Jed Bindeman spotted an intriguing self-released cassette in the 'New Age' section. A long search ensued. Not even Boutet (now a professor at the University of Quebec) owned a copy. Now you can. What's it like? Well, that's complicated. Inspired by '70s prog and the British poet and electronic musician Anne Clark, it's an eclectic mélange of French chanson, John Barry-esque spy themes, wintery Oneohtrix Point Never drones, Brigitte Fontaine ballads, keyboard miniatures, intimate Piaf drama and Meredith Monk-style primordial utterances. Recorded with assistance from singer-guitarist Sylvie Gagnon on a Tascam 4-track Portastudio, this is a beautiful, elusive work of avant-garde cinematic art pop that deserves to be far better known. Thanks to the ever-excellent Freedom To Spend it now can be.

Andrew Male



The Mighty Clouds Of Joy

★★★★

Kickin'

OMNIVORE. CD/DL/LP

Exultant gospel-disco from 1975.

Dubbed 'The Temptations Of Gospel' due to their choreographed dance moves and brightly coloured shirts and suits – they even used The Temptations' tailor – LA's Mighty Clouds Of Joy took gospel into new places with 1975's *Kickin'*. Recorded at David Studios in Atlanta with producer Dave Crawford and arranger Mike Terry, it captures the group with finger on black music's pulse, engaging in a thrilling dialogue between church and disco, most notably on Mighty High, the album's show-stopping first single, a four-on-the-floor high-energy dance groove smothered in hi-hat and a US dance Number 2. An inspired shouldn't-work-but-does medley comprising Kiki Dee's I Got The Music In Me and Stevie Wonder's Superstition provides another ecstatic stand-out, their voices rich, tough and harmonious, but everything here is touched by magic.

Lois Wilson

Free spirits: Alan Braufman blasts away with nephew Nabil Ayers (son of Roy/Valley Of Search label founder/4AD GM) on drums, Alan's apartment, Canal Street, NYC, circa '74.

Courtesy Nabil Ayers

Canyons Of Your Mind

This month's revived power source: chaos and luminescence from a New York jazz loft.

Alan Braufman
Valley Of Search

INDIA NAVIGATION, 1975

IN THE EARLY '70s, downtown Manhattan was a textbook example of urban blight. It came with a musical upside. Unable to gain a foothold in New York's traditional clubs, a generation of young free jazz improvisers set up alternative venues in its abandoned warehouses, factories and galleries, charging as little as a dollar for entrance. Alongside Sam Rivers' Studio Rivbea (24 Bond Street), drummer Rashied Ali's Ali's Alley (77 Greene Street) and Ornette Coleman's Jazz Loft (131 Prince Street), a group of Berklee College of Music students set up shop at 501 Canal Street's old storefront.

"We were right on the fringe of the New York loft scene, the new kids on the block," says alto saxophonist Alan Braufman. "It was fun. David [S Ware, saxophonist] and I shared a space on the second floor, Gene [Ashton, pianist, now known as Cooper-Moore] was on the third, Chris [Amberger, bassist] on the fourth, Jimmy [Hopps, drummer] on the fifth. Music was always happening."

Inspired by his mother's jazz collection, the Long Island-born Braufman started out on clarinet at eight, switching to sax at 13. And while he harbours some regrets about Berklee ("I just wanted to play, I didn't take my classes seriously enough"), it was where he started to write a debut LP heavily inspired by the evolving nature of Don Cherry's *Complete Communion* and *Symphony For Improvisers*.

Apart from dodging electricity meter readers, living at Canal Street proved a creative boon. "I could play 24-7," he recalls, "I didn't have to worry about neighbours, the rent was very low [$140 a month all-in], it was the freest I've ever been – no financial commitments, no car, no house. David got a job delivering lunches to Wall Street executives for three hours a day, so I joined him on that. On a typical day I'd practise between seven and 10, go to work at 11, then just play or do aikido all evening."

Along the way he racked up his first credits, playing on multi-reedist Richard Landry's influential *Solos* (pieced together from loft sessions at Chatham Square, Chinatown) and well-travelled bassist Cecil McBee's swinging 1974 set *Mutima*. McBee also introduced him to India Navigation label boss Bob Cummins. "Bob came down to Canal Street, heard the music and asked, 'Do you want to record this?'" Later that year he set up microphones in the storefront and Braufman's band "treated it like a live concert, even though there was no audience. We played it straight through."

The resulting *Valley Of Search* was chance-taking music that crystalised the free jazz underground. From Ashton's droning dulcimer on folk-edged introduction Rainbow Warriors to his spoken Bahá'í prayer on meditative sequel Chant, the album swells into light, its true colours showing through when Braufman switches from flute to alto in its second movement. Love Is For Real rides a sea of choppy piano as it builds from a simple melodic fragment into something far wilder, Braufman's broad tone redolent of Sanders, Coltrane and Shepp. Elsewhere, McBee's mastery of low-end comes into its own over Miracles' four-minute solo, while conclusion Destiny makes the most of Lee and Williams' percussive armoury. Nervy, exuberant, persistent, its rugged transitions and spiritual introspection – offset by resonant themes and off-piste-improv – are delivered with wailing, unremitting force.

Although well received by DownBeat and Village Voice, Braufman says "that version wasn't as strong as some of our other performances at Canal Street. I was a bit immature at the time. I thought, Those things grow on trees, I'll make another album soon. I didn't realise it was going to be 45 years until the next one!"

As the loft jazz scene fell prey to the real estate boom in the late '70s, the area around Canal Street was redubbed Tribeca and Braufman earned his crust playing alto with Carla Bley (on 1979's career-high *Musique Mecanique*), flute with drummer William Hooker (1982's *Brighter Lights*) and touring with Psychedelic Furs. Attempts to reboot his own solo career fell on fallow ground in the mid-'80s. Later, Braufman relocated to Salt Lake City to teach saxophone at Utah State University. The first he knew *Valley Of Search* was enjoying a second life came via his nephew, 4AD General Manager Nabil Ayers. "He said a copy had just sold for over $400 on eBay. I was like, Really? Who'd do that?"

After Ayers repressed it on vinyl in 2018, Braufman reunited with Cooper-Moore for 2020 comeback *The Fire Still Burns*. A third studio LP, *Infinite Love Infinite Tears*, featuring Patricia Brennan and James Brandon Lewis, follows this May, with no lessening of intensity from its 72-year-old author. "Alan is an incredibly calm, powerful, and stabilising presence," says Ayers. "One of my favourite things is seeing this quiet, unassuming guy walking into a room, strapping on his saxophone and blowing the doors off."

Andy Cowan

Infinite Love Infinite Tears is released in May on Valley Of Search.

CREDITS

Tracks: Rainbow Warriors/Chant/Thankfulness/Love Is For Real/Forshadow/Miracles/Ark Of Salvation/Little Nabil's March/Destiny

Personnel: Alan Braufman (saxophone, flute, pipe-horn), Gene Ashton (piano, dulcimer), Cecil McBee (bass), David Lee (drums), Ralph Williams (percussion)

Producer: Bob Cummins

Released: 1975

Recorded: 501 Canal Street, New York

Current availability: Vinyl reissue (Valley Of Search, 2018)

"It was the freest I've ever been."
ALAN BRAUFMAN

Spring has sprung: Linda Smith uncovers some lost beauties.

Grupo Los Yoyi

★★★★

Yoyi

MR BONGO. CD/DL/LP

Cuban rarity offers rumbadelic disco.

In the 1970s, as North American dancefloors opted for non-communist salsa over Cuban mambo, Fidel Castro made a Canute-like stand against the tide washing alien music into Havana: rock and disco were proscribed in favour of indigenous rhythms. The composer Jorge Soler León may not have received the memo, however, for *Yoyi* is an auteurist dive into psychedelic funk, jazz and disco. Released in 1977, it failed to find an audience but has the orchestral sweep of contemporary classic soul. Banana features a battle between trombone (representing salsa) and trumpets (mambo) over squelching keyboards; El Fino has a conga rhythm any Fania big band would be proud of, while the lead guitarist makes merry with the FX; Mi Pequeño Gran Paolo mixes gospel with MOR in a possible Beatles tribute; and Paco La Calle is space disco. Perhaps its time is now.

David Hutcheon

Martin Rev

★★★★

Martin Rev

BUREAU B. CD/DL/LP

1980 solo LP debut from Suicide's analogue synth minimalist.

1980 was a busy year for Martin Rev. Firstly came the Ric Ocasek-produced second Suicide LP, an arsenic-cookie of urban synth-pop venom baked in modern-day New York sleaze. By contrast, Rev's first solo album proper sounded like the ruined future, a dissonant distress signal from some impoverished space-age dystopia. It begins optimistically, with the chiming shopping-mall Kraftwerk of Mari, but then things turn disquieting with sinister vocal entreaty Baby O Baby and the discordant chimes of proto-techno loop Nineteen 86. The mood – paranoid, sci-fi, relentless – intensifies with Temptation, eight minutes of simplistic steel-comb melodies buried under electronic squall and the remorseless industrial drone assault of Jomo. It's a sound that should alienate, yet by album closer, Asia, with its heavy analogue pulse, echoing metallic glissandos and warped piano reverb, the mood feels more hypnotic than intimidating. You accept Rev's apocalypse. Nay, you welcome it.

Andrew Male

Brion Gysin

★★★★

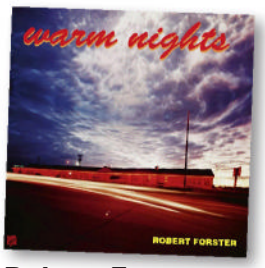
Junk

WEWANTSOUNDS. DL/LP

A 24 carat early-'80s Parisian No Wave curiosity with Don Cherry on backing vocals.

It would be stretching the point to describe Brion Gysin as Little Richard to William Burroughs' Pat Boone, but the original progenitor of the cut-up technique – sampling's literary forebear – is long overdue some time in the pop crossover spotlight. Cue this welcome reboot of producer Ramuntcho Matta's improbably successful attempt to reinvent the veteran British Canadian writer and artist as a kind of raddled Grace Jones. "It isn't the cough that carries you off, it's the coffin they carry you off in," Elli Medeiros intones mordantly in landmark Afro-funk anti-nicotine statement Stop Smoking. Gysin's rasped reply "Stop smoking? You're joking…" was grimly prophetic as he was to die of lung cancer two years later, but even the bonus tracks on which he features only implicitly – especially Lizzy Mercier Descloux and Caroline Loeb's captivating sapphic fragment VVV – testify to a life force that transcended the physical dimension.

Ben Thompson



Robert Forster

★★★★

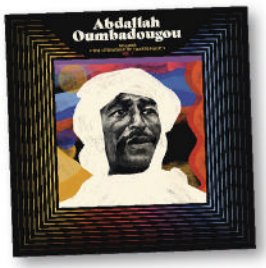
Warm Nights

NEEDLE MYTHOLOGY. CD/DL/LP

A Go-Between's fourth solo scorcher, now with bonus 4-track EP.

Forster's 1990s are often misunderstood as a low-key hiatus between Act One and Act Two of The Go-Betweens, but his solo records remained excellent, not least 1996's *Warm Nights*. Its buzzing evocation of Brisbane heat was actually produced in London by Edwyn Collins, capturing what Forster identifies as "a dry low-end groove pitched between Creedence Clearwater Revival and Willie Mitchell's early-'70s Hi Records work." Hence sprung, skinny choogles like I Can Do and Warm Nights sit alongside taut melodrama Cryin' Love. Forster wrote the songs quickly by his standards, but evidently fretted over it at length: 28 years later, B-side Half The Way Home has been switched in for classic Go-Betweens leftover Rock'n'Roll Friend (relegated to a bonus 7-inch EP), and oompah horns reinstated on Fortress. A simultaneous reissue of 1994 covers set *I Had A New York Girlfriend* is also overhauled, with a new cover and title – *Beautiful Hearts*.

John Mulvey



Abdallah Oumbadougou

★★★★

Amghar: The Godfather Of Tuareg Music Vol. 1

PETALUMA. DL/LP

Compilation of music by the man who introduced the blues to Niger.

At the same time as Tinariwen were developing Tuareg guitar music as the sound of rebellion in Mali, Oumbadougou's band, Takrist Nakal, were playing a complementary role in Niger, where an authoritarian government schemed to eliminate nomads entirely and uranium mining encroached on their land. Seemingly less enthusiastic than other musicians about being a poster boy for insurgency (at one point he was arrested when it was his brother who had upset the authorities), Oumbadougou released five albums between 1995's *Anou Malan* (reissued by Sahel Sounds in 2019) and 2012's *Zozodinga*, managing to sound at various points like each of Tinariwen's distinctive vocalists. The music itself is faster and features more technical flourishes and a bit less groove than the Malians – as recently taken to extremes by self-confessed fans Bombino and Mdou Moctar – but is no less hypnotic for all that.

David Hutcheon

Linda Smith

★★★★

I So Liked Spring

CAPTURED TRACKS. DL/LP

Renaissance of a 1980s Baltimore maverick.

A PIONEER of home recording, Smith produced DIY cassettes of her intimate ballads and hand-sewn indie songs during the 1980s and '90s. Stumbling on the tapes again 30 years later she digitised them, found a label – and, with retirement from her museum security job in 2021, a well of lost beauty is being uncovered. Of two companion albums, *Nothing Else Matters* is ironic and faux-naïve, a mix of The Raincoats, Vashti Bunyan and Jonathan Richman, while *I So Liked Spring* puts melody to the work of English Victorian poet Charlotte Mew. Fin De Fete, with its giddy harmonium, and the genial folk-pop Afternoon Tea are archly nostalgic, a female response to The Kinks. Rooms has a slick Velvet Underground eeriness; the title track is woozy, mellow rock – "I so liked spring last year/Because you were here/I so liked you." Better yet, she's started recording again.

Glyn Brown

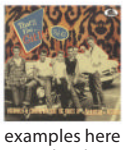
Various

★★★★

That'll Flat Git It! Vol. 43: Rockabilly & Country Bop From The Vaults Of Allstar Records

BEAR FAMILY. CD

Stomping new entry with gems from Houston's Allstar label, 1957-'64.



Bear Family's long-running series shows no sign of slacking with some prime examples here of what got Texas honky-tonks fired up on a Saturday night, mostly cut by people who inherited Hank Williams' juke joint holler and mixed in some rock'n'roll. Allstar's owner Dan Mechura was clearly a believer in what Sam Phillips at Sun called 'going for gutbucket' – the drums pound away like someone getting physical on an oil drum with a wooden mallet, everything sounds liver than hell, and the performers generally deliver in fine fashion. Highlights include Red Dress by Johnny Huskey & The King Bees (an excellent rocker in the Brand New Cadillac mould), Wiley Barkdull's berserk guitar instrumental Tiger By the Tail, and Prince Arky & His Westerners' superbly relaxed downhome bopper, Ten Horned Devel (yep, they spelt it wrong on the label). Top class.

Max Décharné

Mixing things up: Studio One's visionary owner/producer Clement 'Coxsone' Dodd left behind the finest catalogue of reggae music ever recorded.

Studio One Reggae

The pick of Jamaica's foundational label. By Simon McEwen.

REGGAE'S MOST important record label Studio One began life 70 years ago as a soundsystem in Kingston, Jamaica. Its then 22-year-old owner Clement 'Coxsone' Dodd (he was a good cricketer at school and was nicknamed after short-tempered Yorkshire bowler Alec Coxon) was an avid jazz fan who during a 1954 trip to Harlem in New York had picked up a batch of boogie woogie, R&B, merengue and jazz records to play out on his Sir Coxsone's Downbeat soundsystem. With deejay pioneer Count Machuki on mike duties, Coxsone's sound was an immediate sensation, rivalling the more established Duke Reid's Sound System and Prince Buster's Voice Of The People. But as the American R&B craze fizzled out towards the end of the 1950s, Dodd and his competitors were forced to record their own homegrown Jamaican music to meet demand.

Coxsone opened the doors to his Studio One facility at 13 Brentford Road, Kingston in 1963, a year after Jamaican independence and at the height of the ska boom. It was the first black-owned recording studio on the island and became known as the 'Motown of Jamaica', with Dodd producing (alongside gifted engineer Sylvan Morris and genius musical director Jackie Mittoo) trailblazing records by such reggae luminaries as The Wailers, Burning Spear, The Skatalites, Horace Andy, Toots & The Maytals, The Heptones, Marcia Griffiths, Delroy Wilson, Ken Boothe… the list goes on. The imprint's dominance during the mid '60s and early '70s can be put down to a variety of factors: Dodd's exceptional musical taste and acute ear for a hit; his skills as a facilitator and no-nonsense business approach (although, significantly, he was the only producer to allow his Rastafarian singers and players to smoke their sacred herb in the studio); the label had its own instantly recognisable sound – a jazzy, mellifluous flow of catchy melodies, immaculate vocal harmonies and infectious rhythms. But, really, it comes down to the simple fact that Studio One had more swing, groove and – crucially – soul than any other label.

By the mid-'80s digital dancehall ruled Jamaica and S1's popularity was on the wane, so Dodd shut up shop and relocated to New York before his death in 2004. The visionary producer left behind the finest catalogue of reggae music ever recorded, which has since been lovingly curated under licence by labels such as Heartbeat and Soul Jazz, while the former's Chris Wilson is currently repressing Studio One material from the vaults through S1. But be warned, with this month's How To Buy: this vast, ageless archive is the richest seam in reggae history, with original vinyl pressings going for exorbitant prices, so be prepared to occasionally dig a little deeper for the gold…

> "Studio One had more swing, groove and – crucially – soul than any other label."

Brian Jahn/urbanimage.tv, Alamy

CAST YOUR VOTES…

This month you chose your Top 10 Studio One Reggae LPs. Next month we want your Pretenders & Chrissie Hynde Top 10. Send selections via X, Facebook, Instagram or e-mail to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk with the subject 'How To Buy The Pretenders' and we'll print the best comments.

10 Dub Specialist
Dub Store Special

STUDIO ONE, 1974

You say: "*Dub Store Special*… the ideal shop-window into Studio One's best dub deconstructions." M. Longstaff, via Facebook

From 1974 to '80 Dodd released a series of excellent dub LPs of which this, the only one to feature the engineering skills of Sylvan Morris before he left for Harry J's studio, is the pick. The mixing-desk treatments might not be as wild or experimental as say, King Tubby or Lee Perry, but the carefully calibrated repetition and evergreen rhythms win out, especially when tenorman Cedric 'Im' Brooks and trombonist Vin Gordon's jazzy horns are given space in the mix. Judicious use of reverb and echo on highlight Musical Science gives this stripped-back version of Karl Bryan & The Afrokats' Money Generator added fire, the booming bass and accentuated Nyabinghi drums as heavy as S1 dub got.

4 Johnny Osbourne
Truths And Rights

STUDIO ONE, 1980

You say: "Johnny transmits Jah word with matchless soul and elegance." R Spellman, via e-mail

Dancehall star Osbourne cut his first 45 – All I Have Is Love with The Wildcats – for Dodd in 1969, but his career stalled after an extended stay in Canada. On his return to Jamaica 10 years later, the singer hooked up with the producer again and struck gold with proto-dancehall/roots classic *Truths And Rights*, an outstanding set which added new lyrics to vintage Brentford Rd rhythms while still managing to sound fresh and of-the-moment. Osbourne's yearning, soulful delivery could ride any rhythm, most evident on the title track's righteous makeover of Al Campbell's Take A Ride and We Need Love's buoyant take on Otis Gayle's immortal I'll Be Around. Best avoid the silly vinyl prices and instead plump for Heartbeat's 2008 CD reissue.

9 Dennis Alcapone
Forever Version

STUDIO ONE, 1971

You say: "S1's premier chatterer riding vintage rhythms in fine style." Andrew Stockton, via e-mail

Dodd's answer to U-Roy's 1970 *Version Galore* set for Duke Reid, *Forever Version* is equally as good and similarly one of the most important records in JA deejay history. Dennis Alcapone was an original 'sing-jay' stylist, here exuberantly jive-talking over dancehall classics by Larry Marshall (Nanny Version), The Wailers (Dancing Version), The Heptones (Baby Version) and Carlton & The Shoes (Forever Version). Dennis's lyrical dexterity is a marvel, whether he's responding to snatches of the original vocals, hilariously subverting nursery rhymes or interjecting with his trademark high-pitched whoops. Go for 2015's deluxe reissue and, as the OG deejay says: "Lick it back from the top, to the very last drop!"

8 Marcia Griffiths
At Studio One

STUDIO ONE, 1980

You say: "*At Studio One* highlights why Marcia is JA's most gifted woman singer ever." J. O'Sullivan @Sullivan_O6, via X

The undisputed Queen of Reggae, Griffiths began her singing career at S1 aged just 15, later scoring her first hit for Dodd in 1968 with the joyous rocksteady scorcher Feel Like Jumping. She soon found international fame with partner Bob Andy as singing duo Bob & Marcia, chalking up a UK Number 5 in 1970 with a stirring cover of Nina Simone's Young, Gifted & Black, before joining Bob Marley's I-Threes in '74. But it's this debut LP where Griffiths set out her stall, the intuitively soulful singer's warm and expressive tones enveloping Andy-penned cuts such as Truly, Melody Life and Mark My Word. Marcia also features on SJ's indispensable *Studio One Women Vol. 1 & 2* compilations.

7 Cedric 'Im' Brooks
Im Flash Forward

STUDIO ONE, 1977

You say: "*Im Flash Forward* is jazzy, soulful and dread all at once." P. Heaney, via e-mail

Like many of his brass-playing peers (including most of The Skatalites), tenor sax man Brooks was an alumnus of Kingston's Alpha Boys' School which encouraged music tuition for "wayward boys". Clearly it set Im straight, because this set of sizzling instrumentals recorded in the early '70s are right up there with Studio One's best. Engineer Sylvan Morris overdubs Brooks' smoky, mournful horn on versions of Abyssinians' immortal Rasta anthem Declaration Of Rights (here Father Forgive), Horace Andy's rudeboy-cautioning Skylarking (Idle Berg) and Freddy McKay's bewitching hit Picture On The Wall. The playing is cool, seductive and reflective throughout, Brooks skilfully reinterpreting these classic rhythms and making them all his own.

6 Various
Pirates Choice

STUDIO ONE, 1981

You say: "All the Studio One golden eggs in one basket!" Lloyd Odell, via mojo4music.com

Grudgingly released by Coxsone in response to the bootleg LP *Best Of Studio One Vol. 4* (Dodd would never have put out such an *all*-killer comp), this imperial collection of rare cuts from the S1 treasure chest is an ideal primer for those who want a quick – though expensive – way in to the catalogue. It's a fan-picked, first team line-up too: Burning Spear, Horace Andy, Alton Ellis, Sugar Minott, Johnny Osbourne, Carlton & The Shoes… while the opening two tracks, Jay Tees' A Prayer To Jah and Jah Light by Judah Eskender, are deep roots masterworks that are worth the hefty price of admission alone. Also check the recently released *Pirates Choice Vol. 2 & 3* (currently digital-only), both out on the reactivated Studio One label.

5 Jackie Mittoo
The Keyboard King At Studio One

UNIVERSAL SOUND, 2000

You say: "Jackie '*The Keyboard King*' Mittoo – the funkiest man to ever come out of Jamaica." Anthony C @AntC_77, via X

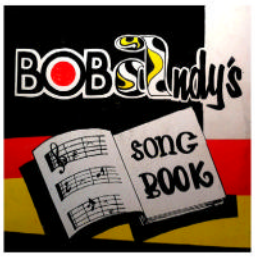
As a founding member of The Skatalites at age 15 and then leader of the various S1 house bands, Hammond maestro Jackie Mittoo was Jamaica's most important musician of all. This superb collection cherry-picks from the string of solo instrumental LPs Mittoo recorded at Brentford Rd in the late '60s to early '70s. The vibe is effortless Kingston-meets-Memphis funk-soul, Jackie soloing like Booker T over a range of robust S1 rhythms. The Keyboard King was indispensable to Dodd, the producer commenting on hearing of his passing in 1990: "Jackie was an ambassador of our music worldwide… may his name be remembered and his music live on."

3 The Skatalites
Foundation Ska

HEARTBEAT, 1997

You say: "Phenomenal early-'60s picks from the first great band of reggae." H Anderson, via e-mail

Jamaica's premier instrumental band The Skatalites were only together from 1963 to '65, but their contribution to the island's music and towering influence beyond is incalculable. Although the core members, including mercurial trombone genius Don Drummond, also recorded for rival producers Duke Reid and Justin Yap, it was Dodd who was most responsible for the group's formation. This top-drawer Heartbeat comp perfectly illustrates how The Skatalites defined the sound of S1 in the early years, the band in spiritual communion (half of them were Rastas) and exploring jazz and big band swing influences, folklore melodies, traditional mento, soul, TV/movie themes and even The Beatles (I Should Have Known Better).



2 Bob Andy
Song Book

STUDIO ONE, 1970

You say: "Personally, I'd have Bob Andy's *Song Book* at Number 1." Steve Barker @SteveBarkerOTW, via X

One of Jamaica's greatest, though often overlooked, singer-songwriters, *Song Book* was Andy's first and best collection of material recorded at S1 during 1966-'68, though not released until 1970. Featuring stone cold classic lovers (Desperate Lover; Let Them Say; Too Experienced) and reality-themed gems (Unchained; Crime Don't Pay; My Time), it also boasts out and out masterpiece I've Got To Go Back Home, replete with majestic horns from the Soul Vendors and vocal harmonies by Bunny Wailer and Peter Tosh. Elsewhere, Andy's heartfelt delivery, exquisite phrasing and exceptional songcraft is epitomised on the joyful Feeling Soul (when he sings "You've got to feel the soul down inside of you", you really do *feel* it).

Burning Spear
Sounds From The Burning Spear

SOUL JAZZ, 2004

You say: "The Spear's two Studio One LPs is where deep roots reggae began." TJ Whittle, via mojo4music.com

From the moment you first hear Winston Rodney's brooding, husky voice – like some ancient-sounding mantra – on debut S1 single Door Peeper ("Door peep shall not enter this a holy land") you know this music is serious. Devout Rastafarian Rodney, who named himself after Kenya's founder Jomo Kenyatta (Jomo means Burning Spear in the Kikuyu language), cut two epochal LPs for Dodd, 1973's *Studio One Presents*… and '74's *Rocking Time*, both represented here on this definitive collection from Soul Jazz. Defiantly uncommercial, righteous and raw, tracks such as Door Peeper, This Race, Call On You, Creation Rebel and Bad To Worse prefigured the roots reggae of the late '70s with their themes of black pride, personal and social advancement, and repatriation to Africa. For reggae aficionados these elemental, radical recordings are the Holy Grail of deep roots, but really they should find a home in any music lover's collection.

NOW DIG THIS

Bubbling under in this Top 10 are personal favourites: The Wailing Souls' 1975 eponymous debut, Alton Ellis: *Sunday Coming* (1970), Horace Andy: *Skylarking* (1972) and Carlton & The Shoes: *Love Me Forever* (1979). For the best documentary about the label, seek out the 2002 comp *Studio One Story* by Soul Jazz which comes with a CD, DVD and booklet. Other must-have SJ collections, all currently available, are the various volumes of *Studio One Dub* (2004), *…Rockers* (2001), *…Roots* (2001), *… Supreme* (2017) and *Black Man's Pride* (2017). For more esoteric but equally essential comps, get your hands on *Solid Gold, Coxsone Style* (Heartbeat, 1992), *Mojo Rock Steady* (Heartbeat, 1994) and the 2-CD *Respect To Studio One* (Heartbeat, 1994). And for visual thrills, Cover Art Of Studio One Records (Soul Jazz Books) is a deluxe hardback edition featuring hundreds of striking full-size sleeves. Happy hunting!

Diggin' the ribs: Terry Allen (right) and Lloyd Maines, Stubb's Bar-B-Q, Lubbock, April 1979.

Milton Adams courtesy of Joe and Sharon Ely

Art and graft

The Southwestern maverick has been widely misunderstood for 60 years. At last: a reckoning, says Grayson Haver Currin.

Truckload Of Art: The Life And Work Of Terry Allen

★★★★

Brendan Greaves

HACHETTE. £26

IN SEPTEMBER 1971, Terry Allen was a 28-year-old father of two struggling to maintain the tenuous footholds he'd gained in Los Angeles' interconnected visual arts and music communities. A native of north Texas's endless horizons, Allen's esoteric country tunes and hypertextual and oft-ribald early drawings had earned him many prominent fans, friends, and exhibitions, but recognition frequently doesn't pay. The young Allen family struggled. So they decamped to Fresno, the San Joaquin Valley city at the edge of the Sierra Nevada so unglamorous some residents now say "Fres-yes" in its pre-emptive defence. For six years, Allen taught art at the state school there, struggling for promotions and joining a clutch of like-minded professors promoting the artistic vanguard despite administrative protestations. It was a slog, exacerbated by crippling cluster headaches.

And then, in 1977, Allen took a sabbatical that, through a bit of ducking and diving, lasted for five years, or almost as long as his actual work there. It became an essential period in Allen's career, not only when he recorded the sprawling outsider-country classic *Lubbock (On Everything)* but also made major inroads in the visual world through crucial installations. The financial stability of his nominal post afforded him the opportunity to realise his vision, as he'd scrapped to do since graduating from LA's Chouinard Art Institute. "There's a lot of casualties," he remembered of that post-school period. He survived long enough to not become one.

That scenario encapsulates the wily persistence of a true lifer that biographer Brendan Greaves captures so well in Truckload Of Art. A dazzling and dense account of eight decades of Allen's work and the often tragic circumstances that prompted it, Truckload Of Art grounds minute detail and piece-by-piece exegesis with an unspoken but inspiring credo: find a way to make what you want, and do it forever, even (especially?) if it means stringing along university bureaucrats.

Before Greaves was an official Allen scholar, he was a tireless advocate, as his label, Paradise Of Bachelors, has been restoring Allen's absorbing catalogue to its proper glory since their 2016 reissue of *Juarez* and *Lubbock*. (Greaves' linernotes for 2019's fantastic *Pedal Steal + Four Corners* earned a Grammy nomination.) His research is as meticulous and exhaustive as his writing is inspired, regularly deploying phrases like "dim drinkers' demimonde" or "deflating phallic frankfurter" to meet Allen at his own level. What's more, he deftly moves between biography and criticism, unpacking Allen's famously inscrutable drawings and verses, capable of spooling in and out of one another for decades as if gliding along a Möbius strip, through empathetic understanding of where the artist has been.

"Memories are hemorrhages… that stain our speech, our stories, and our mark-making," Greaves writes of an Allen work at one point, "with Rorschach bruises of untruths, exaggerations, and fantasies." Greaves first gets to the root of Allen's memories, best he can – his alcoholic but doting mother, his charismatic and enterprising father, his fleet of gone-too-soon friends, his fractious but brilliant and enduring marriage to co-conspirator Jo Harvey Allen. And then he considers all the ways that life has bled into Allen's work and, in turn, become his life. There are enough anecdotal encounters with truly famous chums, from David Byrne to Robert Irwin, to delight even the casual reader. But Truckload Of Art is more inspiring than its chance encounters, a true testament to commitment from both artist and biographer.

"A true testament to commitment from both artist and biographer."

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- Allen's father was a busy promoter in Lubbock, Texas putting on concerts and wrestling matches. One night, Elvis and his rhythm section rolled up to the family home, gear crammed into a station wagon. They shared supper. The 12-year-old Allen was only vaguely impressed.
- Allen saw Zappa and the Mothers Of Invention open for The Velvet Underground & Nico in LA in May 1966, when the epitome of New York cool was in town to add bits to their forthcoming debut. The Mothers and the Velvets traded spars, and Allen was swept up in lifelong enthusiasm for the away team. "Cold-blooded," he dubbed Reed's writing, admiringly.
- When David Byrne first asked Jo Harvey Allen to appear in his directorial debut, True Stories, she thought he was a stalker. And then she volunteered to play every character. She became 'The Lying Woman'.
- In the early '90s, Byrne and Allen – as The Juarez Bros. – worked diligently to turn *Juarez* into a touring musical, potentially starring Lucinda Williams, Dwight Yoakam and Rosie Perez. Funding woes, recession, and their respective busy schedules squashed the project after years of effort.

Cosmic Scholar: The Life And Times Of Harry Smith

★★★★

John Szwed

FARRAR, STRAUSS AND GIROUX. £25.99

The volatile esoteric who uncovered the Old Weird America.

Spring 1985, and Bob Dylan turns up at Allen Ginsberg's apartment to play him *Empire Burlesque*. The playback, though, is interrupted by the complaints of Ginsberg's lodger coming from another room – Harry Smith, arcane mage behind 1952's *Anthology Of American Folk Music*, the compilation from which Dylan learned so much. Dylan wants to meet Smith, but Smith refuses. "Harry thought of Dylan as his own creation, the product of the *Anthology*," Szwed writes. "He didn't want to upset the spiritual relationship between them." Smith, it transpires, was not averse to upsetting innumerable other relationships, and Szwed (also biographer of Sun Ra) does a meticulous job making sense of this chaotic legend of boho New York, as addiction, rage and inexhaustible hustling interweave with Native American anthropology, experimental films and occult investigations as well as music. The castlist is rich – Thelonious Monk, Patti Smith, The Fugs; the stories wild; the scholarship formidable. As the loyal, if frequently exasperated, Ginsberg eulogised, "So unique, so painfully suffering, so self-abrogating, so devious, so saintly."

John Mulvey

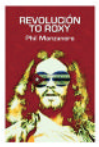
Revolución To Roxy

★★★★

Phil Manzanera

WORDZWORTH PUBLISHING. £35

Roxy Music guitarist's warm and conversational memoir.



Few musicians' autobiographies feature their subject witnessing a revolution. But growing up in Cuba (to a British father and Colombian mother), eight-year-old Phil Manzanera was there for Fidel Castro's historical coup. As he points out in this book's preface, "It's no problem if you want to skip straight to Roxy, but you'll be missing out on some cracking stories…" These include tales from a peripatetic childhood in Caracas, Hawaii and Dulwich and a nightmarish live performance with Bob Dylan. Manzanera doesn't stint on documenting Roxy Music, though, or recalling their clashing egos (Brian versus Bryan, especially). Manzanera's later admission that he earned more from Jay-Z and Kanye West sampling his solo track, K-Scope, than he did from Roxy, leaves him grateful but bemused. This isn't a deep, no-stone-unturned memoir, but it's none the worse for that. "Hasta la victoria, siempre," ("until victory, always") he signs off, quoting Che Guevara.

Mark Blake

The Future Of Songwriting

★★★★

Kristin Hersh

MELVILLE HOUSE FUTURES SERIES. £8.99

Throwing Muses frontwoman and solo artist unpicks that art vs. commerce debate.

"It took me a long time to extricate myself from corporate rock and forge a grassroots DIY path on my own," Hersh writes in her treatise on songwriting – a creative process that she argues will become less about commodity and ownership, and more an exchange between listener and artist. She picks an unusual, at times frustrating method to explore this, via conversations with an unnamed alternative comedian, a bluff figure who acts more like a sounding board for her musings. But bear with… as always with Hersh, her labyrinthine trail has its own beautiful logic, one that emerges stealthily through this brief, mischievous, insightful book. To Hersh, songs are lifeforms and healing entities, a way of "bringing medicine to the person who needs it". No wonder she felt so at odds with the 'entertainment' world, what she hilariously terms "the zombie apocalypse". This book is as life-affirming as her music.

Lucy O'Brien

Neumusik: The Complete Edition

★★★★

David Elliott

KORM PLASTICS. £15

Complete early-'80s 'zine on 'European, experimental and electronic music'.

Arriving at Sussex university in autumn '79, Elliott was part of a new generation of Kraut/prog fans and musicians keen to carry punk's DIY energy across into their experimental subculture. In his Neumusik's first issue, enthusiastic reviews of Steve Hillage, Cluster and the Woolworths-stocked Wasp synthesizer ran alongside guidance on how to make music with a pocket calculator. A pilgrimage to Berlin yielded issue two's remarkably savvy Q&As with three ex-members of Tangerine Dream, Conrad Schnitzler swingingly dissing contemporary TD as "background music", with the amusing payoff "I cannot do this, because I cannot play". As the publication grew to 60-plus pages, chief writer/editor Elliott got deeper into the French and German scenes (he worshipped Heldon's Richard Pinhas), particularly once he relocated to border town Strasbourg. Packed with synth-love, historical detail and curiosity for every shade of weirdness, the six issues anthologised here constitute a remarkable first-hand resource on an otherwise sketchily documented musical domain.

Andrew Perry

Marc Bolan: A Chronology: There Was A Time

★★★★

Cliff McLenehan

WINTERGARDEN. £45

Superbly-researched, and now greatly expanded, day-by-day account of the Bopping Elf's every move.

Like his childhood hero Eddie Cochran, Marc Bolan packed a formidable amount of music into his short life, either on the road, writing songs or recording them. Inevitably, studio tapes have vanished, gigs were advertised then cancelled, song titles changed and memories differ, but Cliff McLenehan has spent several decades chasing leads and sifting information about Bolan's many activities, and this book is both all-encompassing and authoritative. Contemporary LP, single and gig reviews are reproduced alongside the daily entries, and while in the Tyrannosaurus Rex era the duo were often gently mocked even by supportive journalists ("like a couple of rough gnomes, bashing each other with toadstools"), the venom really came out during the height of T.Rex's fame. From the 1971 US radio session where Marc cut Please Rearrange My Nose, or the precise date he played the Gollum's Cave club in Stoke, it's all here. An essential slice of Bolanology.

Max Décharné

Don't Dream It's Over: The Remarkable Life Of Neil Finn

★★★

Jeff Apter

JAWBONE. £16.95

No-frills account of Crowded House leader's saga.

Neil Finn joined and revitalised Split Enz as a teenager, built the dearly loved Crowded House and enjoyed a late-career busman's holiday as Fleetwood Mac's unlikeliest member since Dave Walker. Along the way, he has stayed married to the same woman since 1982, while his relationship with older brother Tim would fascinate a platoon of psychologists. There's a great book somewhere, but for all that it's a brisk and clear trot through the years, Jeff Apter's take on this "remarkable" life is too unremarkable to compensate for the absence of access. Pivotal events in Neil's life and career, such as sacking Tim from Crowded House mid-tour, are dispensed with in the perfunctory fashion given to his under-estimation of the difficulty of maintaining tennis courts. Worse, beneath the clichés ("egos were checked at the door"), since everything Finn has touched has, apparently, been superlative, there's no critical appraisal to distinguish *One Nil* from *Woodface*.

John Aizlewood

In The Jingle Jangle Jungle

★★★

Joel Gion

WHITE RABBIT. £22

Brian Jonestown Massacre tambourinist's gonzo memoir.

The comic star of 2004's BJM rockumentary Dig!, Gion capers straight into the narcotically skewed San Francisco alt-rock sub-culture which triggered the band. After flunking an audition as guitarist, he's soon enlisted on maracas ("harder to play than they looked"), eventually settling on tambourine (wood-framed only). Bez-like, he moonlights as a speed dealer, struggling to be "professional" with his all-female clientele, but soon providing "snorts" to the UK shoegaze royalty whom BJM open shows for. Ongoingly impecunious, Gion scavenges from Burger King bins, earns bonus coin painting LSD onto blotter, and cops countless injuries amid dust-ups on and off-stage. Of BJM frontman Anton Newcombe he says, "His power […] held everyone in its grip", yet that magnetism, and the musical genius averred in Dig!, remain unexplained. And why the incessant fighting, even as fiftysomethings (a pre-Xmas Antipodean tour ended prematurely)? Our narrator, though entertaining, often misses an entire line-up's departure, and lacks those deeper insights.

Andrew Perry

Revolución rock: Roxy Music guitarist Phil Manzanera (here in 1972) has some cracking stories to tell.

Brian Cooke/Getty

Drama queens: The Shangri-Las (from left) Mary Ann Ganser, Mary Weiss and Marge Ganser in 1965.

Pack leader

The Shangri-Las' streetwise singer **Mary Weiss** has left us age 75.

CRYING SEAGULLS, revving engines and a powerful young female singer whose voice could tear your heart out. In 1964 when the Shangri-Las songs Remember (Walking In The Sand) and Leader Of The Pack first appeared, there was no other group quite like them.

Weiss, who fronted the group, was born in Queens, New York and raised, she said, in poverty. Her father died when she was small and her mother found it hard holding things together. Weiss learned to fend for herself. Since she loved to sing, she formed an a cappella girl group when she was 13 with her big sister Betty and twin schoolfriends Mary Ann and Marge Ganser. They sang on street corners, progressing to sock hops and school dances and made a little cash. Word spread and a local music businessman, Artie Ripp of Kama Sutra, signed them. They made two singles that went nowhere.

Then George 'Shadow' Morton crossed their path. Morton, who wanted to be a songwriter, met Jeff Barry, who'd written a number of hits with his wife Ellie Greenwich. Morton pitched him a song and that same night went home and wrote Remember (Walking In The Sand). The Shangri-Las were hired to sing the demo. Barry and Greenwich thought the seven-minute song weird, but Leiber and Stoller had them record it and released it on Red Bird. It was a Top 10 hit. A second single quickly followed – Barry/Greenwich delinquent death-disc Leader Of The Pack. At 16 years old, Weiss had her first Number 1.

Life became a nonstop series of shows with breaks for recording. During 1964 and '65 the group toured with The Beatles and the Stones and made a promo trip to London, where Remember made the UK Top 20 and Leader Of The Pack – banned by the BBC – topped the charts. They released several more singles but no more Number 1s. Things worsened when they moved to Mercury, largely since Weiss was spending most of her time battling music business lawsuits and making no money.

In 1968 The Shangri-Las disbanded. For the next decade, legally prohibited from using the group's name or singing their songs, Weiss took a nine to five job. In 1977 Seymour Stein signed her to Sire, but no record came out. There was a one-off Shangri-Las reunion in New Jersey in '89. Weiss later signed to Norton Records and, backed by Memphis garage punks Reigning Sound, released *Dangerous Game* (2007), her first and last solo album.

Weiss went back to her day job, but the impact of The Shangri-Las lived on. Still does. Not just the "drama" that Amy Winehouse loved about their music, but their whole look and attitude. Where other mid-'60s girl groups wore chiffon dresses, Weiss's group wore black pants bought from the men's department, leather waistcoats and boots. They really were street-tough; Greenwich said she found it hard at first to deal with their gum-chewing and cussing in the studio. No big surprise, then, was the influence The Shangri-Las had on the '70s US punk rock scene, particularly in New York.

At the time of her death, Weiss was working on a Shangri-Las project with a scriptwriter: a stage musical featuring their songs.

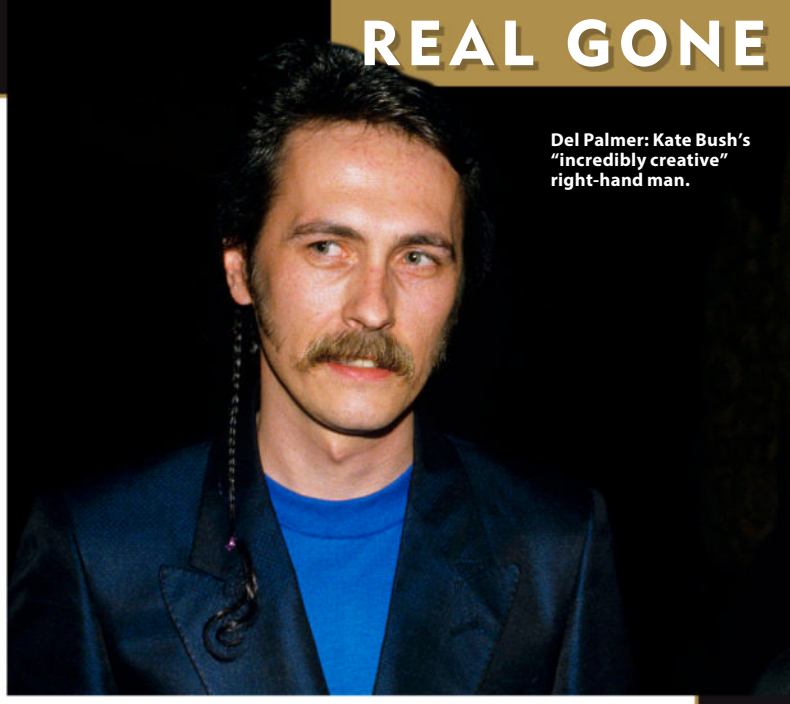
Sylvie Simmons

"No surprise is the influence The Shangri-Las had on the '70s US punk rock scene."

THE LEGACY

The Album: *The Shangri-Las: Myrmidons Of Melodrama* (RPM Records, 1995)

The Sound: The Shangri-Las' mid-'60s releases were more about singles than LPs, which weren't much more than the hits and inessential padding. Over the years there's been a number of compilations, and one of the most complete was the UK CD *Myrmidons* – 29 songs and four radio spots. There's the massive hits and also their first flops (Wishing Well) as well as their melodramatic heartbreakers Maybe and I Can Never Go Home Anymore.



Del Palmer: Kate Bush's "incredibly creative" right-hand man.

Melanie

Soul-baring enchanter

BORN 1947

IN HER MID-TEENS, Melanie Safka aspired to sing like Lotte Lenya and Edith Piaf. "I wanted to sound like a woman in her forties!" she once told me. But when Melanie opened her mouth, all everyone noticed was what they called her "amazing childlike quality".

Signing her in 1968, Buddah marketed Melanie as a pop 'Flower Child', a tag that stuck long after the Summer of Love had wilted. In truth, the kaftan-wearing singer with the long hair and gentle, wide-eyed look, fit the bill perfectly. So too the tunes: Nickel Song, the much-covered What Have They Done To My Song Ma and Brand New Key, the 1971 hit that gave Melanie international fame, were all bounce and hooks.

It was producer and later husband Peter Schekeryk who "got me the hits", Melanie said of the career that ignited after her 1969 Woodstock appearance. "But I wanted people to listen to the words."

The one-time New York street singer had met Schekeryk by accident in an office at 1619 Broadway (alias the Brill Building) after a misdirection to an acting audition. But despite being directed towards pop, Melanie had a unique, highly personalised style – minor-chord songs characterised by hushed verses and choruses that would explode, all delivered in a voice that warbled like UK counterpart Marc Bolan. Her pièce de résistance, Tuning My Guitar, had it all: her complicated relationship with 'the business', her integrity, and a wild, flamenco-inflamed finale that brings to mind Judy Garland and Richie Havens at their most feverish.

Popular at a time when singer-songwriters were exercising restraint, maverick Melanie was marginally behind Yoko Ono in attracting critical flak. Since then, Björk and Joanna Newsom have acknowledged her influence with covers of her songs; Morrissey had her perform at his 2004 Meltdown; and Will Oldham's sublime interpretation of Some Say (I Got Devil) illuminates the depths of this most gentle, gifted and misunderstood artist.

Mark Paytress

Melanie: gentle, gifted and misunderstood.

Brendan Beirne/Shutterstock, Getty (2)

Del Palmer

Long-time Kate Bush collaborator

BORN 1952

A MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST and self-taught studio engineer, Del Palmer spent a great period of his life dedicated to his creative and personal partnership with Kate Bush (the two having been a couple from the late '70s to the early '90s).

"The working relationship was never a problem," he told the BBC in 2014. "I really love her music. To the point I've virtually worked with nobody else. Because nobody else comes close."

Palmer's involvement with Bush's studio work survived their break-up, and in total spanned his bass-playing on 1978's *Lionheart* to his recording of 2011's *50 Words For Snow*. Bush told MOJO in 2005 that he was her most trusted control room collaborator. "I don't feel self-conscious with him there," she stated. "He doesn't interfere with what is a very vulnerable process."

Born Derek Peter Palmer in Greenwich, south-east London, he was in his first band by the age of 15, playing bass in Cobwebs And Strange with guitarist Brian Bath. In 1977, the two formed the KT Bush Band, fronted by the 18-year-old ingénue, performing covers and early versions of songs from *The Kick Inside* on the London pub circuit.

Palmer was key in supporting Bush's home recording autonomy established with 1985's *Hounds Of Love*, providing the LinnDrum tattoo and rolling bass line that were the bedrock of Running Up That Hill (A Deal With God). He was also the Houdini-like escapologist being passed a key, via a kiss, on the cover of 1982's *The Dreaming*.

In later years, Palmer released three solo LPs, most recently 2015's *Point Of Safe Return*. In 2018, he even revived some of his best-known bass lines live, underlining his love for Bush's music by performing with tribute band Cloudbusting.

Following his death aged 71 on January 5, Bush posted an online eulogy: "He was incredibly creative – talented in lots of different ways. It's going to take a long time to come to terms with him not being here with us."

Tom Doyle

Iasos

Chakra energising composer

BORN 1947

IASOS'S immersive ambient fugue, Formentera Sunset Clouds, was a highlight of *I Am The Center*, Light In The Attic's 2013, dial-resetting anthology of private press New Age music, suggesting Eno as readily as meditation. Its composer began life as Joseph Bernardot in Alexandroupolis, Greece, but was raised in upstate New York, adopting his singular identity after studying cultural anthropology at Cornell University and settling in the Bay Area to develop entwined interests in flute composition and spiritualism. Guided by a 'cosmic presence' called Vista and influenced by Debussy and Hendrix, *Inter-Dimensional Music*, Iasos's paradisaical, synth-layered 1975 debut LP, helped define the New Age signature, yet his 15 subsequent albums strove for blissful ascension beyond the genre's aural wallpaper stereotype. In a tribute, journalist John Diliberto described the composer as "an American eccentric who sits alongside artists like Moondog, Harry Partch, Harry Bertoia, and John Fahey."

David Sheppard

"Iasos's 1975 debut LP helped define the New Age signature."

Marlena Shaw

Charismatic jazz and soul singer

BORN 1942

BORN Marlina Burgess in New Rochelle, NY, Shaw was just 10 when she debuted at Harlem's Apollo fronting her uncle Jimmy Burgess's jazz band. On Chess subsidiary Cadet, she issued a series of late-'60s singles – Mercy Mercy Mercy, Woman Of The Ghetto and California Soul – meshing soul with jazz and an emancipatory spirit. Though uncharted, these would reach a new audience in the rare groove and hip-hop era via sampling. Shaw went on to sing with Count Basie and recorded five albums for Blue Note, including 1975's *Who Is This Bitch, Anyway?*. In 1989 she received a Grammy nomination for Is You Is Or Is You Ain't My Baby, a duet with Joe Williams. 2003 saw her last album, *Looking For Love*. "People say they don't know if I sing jazz, pop, soul or blues," she said, "and I say it doesn't matter providing you dig it."

Lois Wilson

MOJO'S FINEST WRITING ON BLUR IN A SINGLE DELUXE VOLUME

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Superstar DJ: Annie Nightingale – BBC Radio 1's first female presenter.

Brian Griffin

Post-punk photographer

BORN 1948

IN 2017, Brian Griffin told MOJO: "I've never pointed a camera at a band on-stage." He still captured some of the most memorable music images ever committed to film. Raised in the Black Country and trained in Manchester, in 1972 he commenced employment as a corporate photographer. Initially working for Stiff Records, after punk he moved into music, photographing talents including The Clash, Siouxsie, The Specials, Iggy Pop, Peter Gabriel, Ian Dury, Elvis Costello and Talk Talk. During post-punk, he created a series of numinous album covers for Echo & The Bunnymen and Depeche Mode, the latter's Soviet-inspired *A Broken Frame* so impressing Kate Bush she asked Griffin to do a similar session for her. He regularly demonstrated a remarkable facility to manipulate light in his portraiture, making the exterior seem interior and using twanged elastic and slow exposures in order to, he said, "play with the human mind." He later worked in film and advertising and curated his archive.

Ian Harrison

Annie Nightingale

DJ pioneer

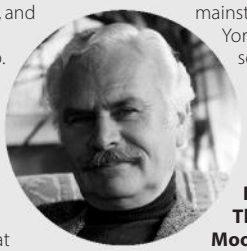
BORN 1940

BORN IN Osterley, Middlesex, Annie Nightingale was a teenage blues fan. She studied journalism at Central London Polytechnic and began her career in the early 1960s writing for the Brighton Argus and hosting her own pop culture show, ATV's That's For Me. She wanted to become a radio DJ, but when BBC Radio 1 was launched in 1967 female presenters were banned. Nightingale persisted for three years until in 1970 she joined as the station's first female DJ. Her late-'70s afternoon request show became legendary, as did her stint presenting BBC2's The Old Grey Whistle Test, steering the show from prog to championing punk and new wave. By 1994 she had an underground dance music show on R1, which she was still presenting at the time of her death. The longest-serving DJ in R1's history, she was awarded an OBE in 2002, and a CBE in 2020. That year her memoir, Hey Hi Hello, celebrated her 50th anniversary in broadcasting.

Lucy O'Brien

THEY ALSO SERVED

REGGAE singer **PLUTO SHERVINGTON** (b.1950) played in Jamaican groups including **The Presidents**, **The Hurricanes** and **Tomorrow's Children** in the '60s and '70s, and ran a Kingston recording studio. Later, as a solo singer, he had witty UK hits with Dat (1976, the year he narrowly missed the Top 40 with Ram Goat Liver) and Your Honour (1982), both of which found him on Top Of The Pops. He also had success as a producer and continued to perform until 2023.



COMPOSER **LAURIE JOHNSON** (above, b.1927) was best known for his TV themes for '60s and '70s programmes including The Professionals, The Avengers, This Is Your Life and many more. Born in Hampstead, he studied at the Royal College Of Music under Vaughan Williams before working as an arranger for band leader **Ted Heath**. He also wrote and recorded for the KPM Music Library from 1960, while his movie scores included Stanley Kubrick's Dr Strangelove, Captain Kronos – Vampire Hunter and others.

AVANT-GARDE COMPOSER **PHILL NIBLOCK** (b.1933) was drawn to making music after seeing a Morton Feldman concert in the '60s. Feldman's durational minimalism was a key influence on Niblock as he began manipulating tapes into vast, micro-detailed drones. He became a mainstay of the New York experimental scene – peer of La Monte Young, collaborator with everyone from **Arthur Russell** to **Thurston Moore** – eventually switching from tape to computer-generated music. He was also director of Experimental Intermedia – a New York foundation for avant-garde music – a filmmaker and photographer.

PRODUCER, writer and blues archivist **NEIL SLAVEN** (b.1945) recorded LPs in the late-'60s for Decca, Deram and Chess, including **Fleetwood Mac**'s *Blues Jam* and LPs for **Savoy Brown**, **Chicken Shack** and **Keef Hartley**. He also published R&B Monthly magazine, compiled sleevenotes and, in 1968, co-published encyclopaedic discography Blues Records 1943-66.

VOCALIST **JAY CLAYTON** (b.1941) was a rarity in the jazz milieu of 1960s New York – a singer in what were predominantly instrumental free jazz circles.

A fearless collaborator and scene-booster who held concerts in her own home, Clayton worked with jazzers including **Steve Lacy**, **Muhal Richard Abrams** and **Charlie Haden**, as well as avant-garde composers **John Cage** and **Steve Reich**. Clayton also served as artistic director for 1979's Salute To Women In Jazz Festival, and, from 1982, taught jazz at universities and workshops across the US.

ACTOR/SINGER **DAVID SOUL** (b.David Solberg, 1943) was born in Chicago and began his music career singing Mexican folk songs in coffee houses. His masked act, David Soul The Covered Man, got him signed to the William Morris Agency in the mid '60s and his acting career took off. He found massive screen fame in US cop show Starsky & Hutch from 1974 to 1979, and scored international solo hits with ballads Don't Give Up On Us (a UK Number 1 in 1976) and 1977's Silver Lady. Living in the UK in the 1990s, Soul recorded the jazzier *Leave A Light On…* and in 2004 played the title role in Stewart Lee's Jerry Springer The Opera.

GUITARIST/violinist/sax and oud player **CHRIS KARRER** (left, b.1947) co-founded **Amon Düül** in Munich in 1967: the following year he formed commune-dwelling offshoot **Amon Düül II**, who recorded Krautrock picks including *Phallus Dei* (1969), *Yeti* (1970) and *Carnival In Babylon* (1972) before their 1981 split. He also recorded solo, played with jazz-rockers **Embryo**, and re-formed Amon Düül II, releasing *Düülirium* in 2014.

SEATTLE music scene eminence and social campaigner, **SUSIE TENNANT** (b.1962) was known for her early role as publicist at the Sub Pop and Geffen labels. A tribute written by her friend Nils Bernstein recalls her early championing of **Nirvana**, **Weezer**, **Beck**, **Sonic Youth**, **Teenage Fanclub**, **Hole**, and more: "With a steadfast belief that great art deserves exposure, Susie insisted that commercial success didn't have to clash with integrity."

GUITARIST and songwriter **TONY CLARKIN** (b.1946) co-founded Birmingham rock icons **Magnum** in 1972. Their progressive instincts took shape with In The Beginning, the eight-minute opener of 1978 debut *Kingdom Of Madness*. Over 50 years and 23 studio LPs, Magnum's sound became more melodic, with 1982's *Chase The Dragon* and 1985's *On A Storyteller's Night* among their most commercially successful. The group's final LP *Here Comes The Rain* was released in January.

MUSIC JOURNALIST **NEIL KULKARNI** (b.1972) contributed incendiary prose to Melody Maker from 1993 until its closure, after writing a letter to the paper decrying its lack of coverage of black music. He later wrote about rap, rock, metal and pop for numerous publications, played with Coventry band **Moonbears**, taught journalism, and wrote books including 2015's The Periodic Table Of Hip Hop. **Chuck D** tweeted a sketch of him, drawn from memory, in tribute.

PRODUCER/SINGER **FRANK FARIAN** (below, b.1941) performed and worked in '60s West Germany, where he had solo pop success in the '70s. In 1974 he recruited and orchestrated dance-pop outfit **Boney M**, who had massive late-'70s hits including Brown Girl In The Ring, Mary's Boy Child and Rasputin, which Farian sang lead on. He also masterminded **Milli Vanilli** and rock supergroup **Far Corporation**, and produced **Meat Loaf**, **Eruption** and more.

Jenny Bulley, Chris Catchpole, Ian Harrison and John Mulvey

Ravi Chandarana, Getty, John Weinzierl, Express Newspapers/N&S Syndication, Interfoto/Alamy Stock

Hot to Bop: (main pic) the Ramones (from left) Joey, Dee Dee, Johnny and Tommy, 1976; (right) Joey on the cover of Punk magazine; (right, below) Johnny, Joey and Dee Dee go full-pelt, CBGB's, 1976.

MARCH 1976
...Ramones prepare for lift-off

MARCH 6 The latest edition of US music biz bible Billboard was its usual mix of corporate news and bottom-line augury. Disco records were taking over the jukeboxes of America, tape piracy was proving a headache internationally, Stax chairman Al Bell owed money to the Chase Manhattan Bank, and veteran bandleader Billy Vaughn had just signed an exclusive deal for Japan.

Change was coming, though. Today, tucked away on page 48, were the words: "…at Plaza, Craig Leon is producing an LP for the Ramones."

The Ramones had formed in Forest Hills, Queens in early '74. The original line-up was guitarist John Cummings, singer/bassist Douglas Colvin and drummer Jeff Hyman: Colvin hit upon the wheeze of calling himself Dee Dee Ramone, in homage to McCartney's sobriquet Paul Ramon when The Beatles were The Silver Beetles, and persuaded the others to follow suit. Tommy Erdelyi, who'd played in garage band The Tangerine Puppets with Cummings when the British Invasion hit, was roped in as manager. At a rehearsal at his studio, he discovered that Dee Dee had a tendency to quickly "sing himself hoarse" and that Hyman's drum skills weren't quite right. With a first thought/best thought utilitarianism that would become typical of the Ramones, he duly encouraged the drummer, now Joey, to sing, and took up the kit himself, despite never having played before. In their regulation leathers, ripped jeans and, for Dee Dee and Johnny, bowlcuts, by August the Ramones were regulars at CBGB's in New York, part of a burgeoning city-wide scene that would include Blondie, Patti Smith and Television.

For a while their full-pelt, chaotic mix of punk and bubblegum pop – their '20 songs in less than 20 minutes' sets were, said Tommy to the SoHo Weekly News, ideal for people with limited spare time – was the preserve of a hip cognoscenti who were initially aghast before delight took over. "Shit," wrote Alan Betrock in February '76 in his just-launched New York Rocker, "wouldn't you rather hear one incredible song played 10 times over, than 10 mediocre songs played one time each?"

> "We have all intentions of getting out of New York and making it all over."
> **JOHNNY RAMONE**

One fan was soon-to-be manager Danny Fields, and by early '76 the Ramones were signed to Sire Records. Recording for their debut LP began with Leon two months later at Plaza Sound, an eighth storey studio above the Radio City Music Hall where Arturo Toscanini rehearsed in the 1930s. Costing around $6,400 and bursting with gritty exuberance – and such future classics as Blitzkrieg Bop, Judy Is A Punk and Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue – *Ramones* came in at 14 songs in 29 minutes. "It's good party music!" Johnny told ZigZag's Kris Needs later that year. "We have all intentions of getting out of New York and making it all over… I want young kids, you know, right up the front. We want to reach high schoolers."

And so, in spring '76, the Ramones began playing away from home, with exploratory trips to play colleges and clubs in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and on March 6, 1976, Ricco's in Belleville, Illinois. On March 22, they played My Father's Place in Roslyn on Long Island with The Heartbreakers. Around the same time Joey appeared in cartoon form on the cover of issue three of Punk magazine, wherein the group explained themselves and saluted the lost fifth Ramone, Ritchie Stern, who "just couldn't keep up" and was

Getty (6), Retro Adarchives/Alamy

now "locked up somewhere".

On *Ramones*' release on April 23, music press reaction was positive. Nick Kent in NME frothed, "absolutely the most grievous hot rock sideswipe from the Nova Heat-Zone since the halcyon grunge of *Raw Power*… this album's going to take off." Creem opined, "Right fucking on." Cash Box, though, called them "pre-pubescent Nazi-rockers" (on account of Third Reich references on Dee Dee's Today Your Love, Tomorrow The World) adding, "definitely the most basic rock witnessed in these parts since 1939". Worse, one possibly apocryphal review called it, "the sound of 10,000 toilets flushing". *Ramones* peaked at US Number 111.

So it went for Johnny, Joey, Dee Dee and their drummers, who carried on for 20 years of hard gigging and recording, always straining for a final breakthrough that never came, but forging a legend in the process. "We'd drive back and forth, back and forth, across the country," recalled Dee Dee in MOJO 87. "We could always tell when a person was a musician by their pained, hunchback-type walk when they just got out of the van…"

They finally hung up their guns in 1996, and now we live in a world with no original Ramones. To those who know their genius, of course, they cannot die. As Joey told the late Ben Edmonds, "We're really just one link in the chain… I always thought it was cool to see how it went from generation to generation, like those family tree things. To see our name mentioned with all those others is a thrill. But none of those names is as important as the chain."

Ian Harrison

Swede thrillers: ABBA (from left) Benny Andersson, Agnetha Fältskog, Björn Ulvaeus, Anni-Frid Lyngstad.

ABBA hit Oz

MARCH 4 **ABBA fly into Sydney for a promotional tour of Australia for the release of compilation *The Best Of ABBA*, which spends 16 weeks at Number 1. The group's 10-day stay includes performances at the city's Channel 9 Studios, where songs include new 45 Fernando, SOS, Mamma Mia and the first airing of Dancing Queen, which is not broadcast until the single's release in August. They also record TV spots including an appearance on games show Celebrity Squares and are filmed having a barbecue, visiting a koala sanctuary and throwing boomerangs. Later in the month the group hold recording sessions for their next album, *Arrival*, after which singers Agnetha and Anni-Frid get some welcome time off.**

ALSO ON!

FOLLY À TROIS

2 The Little Ladies, second episode of ITV music drama Rock Follies, is broadcast. Starring (above) Rula Lenska, Julie Covington and Charlotte Cornwell as a female rock band, songs are by Roxy Music's Andy Mackay and scriptwriter Howard Schuman: the series' soundtrack LP tops the UK chart in April.

TOOTS-Y CALL

3 Toots & The Maytals begin a UK tour at Stoke's Victoria Hall. Support comes from The Heptones. "My right name now is Love," Toots tells Melody Maker's Karl Dallas.

FABS FANDANGO

6 EMI re-releases 22 British Beatles singles, adding a new 45 of Yesterday, which charts at 8. George's dad Harold is reported saying they'll definitely be re-forming for at least one big gig.

RIP KOSS

19 While touring the US with Back Street Crawler, ex-Free guitarist Paul Kossoff dies on a flight from LA to New York, aged 25, after he suffers a pulmonary embolism.

BOWIE 'N' IGGY POT

21 Bowie and Iggy Pop are busted for marijuana possession after the former plays a show in New York. "The police… were very kind," says Bowie in court on March 25. The charges are later dropped. Meanwhile, Bowie's film The Man Who Fell To Earth is released on March 18.

TOP TEN

WEST GERMANY SINGLES MARCH 6

1. **HARPO** MOVIESTAR EMI
2. **ABBA** MAMMA MIA POLYDOR
3. **GEORGE BAKER SELECTION** MORNING SKY WARNER BROS.
4. **JEAN-CLAUDE BORELLY** DOLANNES MELODIE TELEFUNKEN
5. **SILVER CONVENTION** FLY, ROBIN, FLY JUPITER
6. **PUSSYCAT** MISSISSIPPI EMI
7. **5000 VOLTS** I'M ON FIRE EPIC
8. **PENNY McLEAN** LADY BUMP JUPITER/ARIOLA
9. **HELLO** NEW YORK GROOVE BELL
10. **GUNTER GABRIEL** KOMM' UNTER MEINE DECKE HANSA/DER ANDERE SONG

Rising 'star: Harpo reaches the top.

The great escape: Thin Lizzy's Phil Lynott gives the bass some; (above) sixth LP *Jailbreak*.

LIZZY LEAD THE JAILBREAK

MARCH 26 With a John Peel session broadcast on March 9, Thin Lizzy's sixth album, *Jailbreak*, is released the same day they play Brunel University (tickets, £1.20). They've spent the month on a UK tour with Graham Parker & The Rumour. *Jailbreak* reaches UK Number 10 and spawns two hit singles with the title track and signature brawler The Boys Are Back In Town. The album and the latter 45 also go Top 20 in America, though in June singer Phil Lynott blows out a US tour when he comes down with hepatitis. "Everybody thinks I'm a junkie," he tells Sounds' Pete Makowski later in the year, "but I'd like to state quite clearly to any kid that thinks I'm into heavy dope, forget it."

AD ARCHIVE 1976

As Devo, Elvis and Clapton showed, in '76 all the best people grooved about in "Young, hip, tight and sexy" Jump Suits. Bring 'em back!

Title deeds: (clockwise from above left) Queen's Sheer Heart Attack did not appear on the LP of the same name; I want to hold your hand: did Lennon label his demos 'For Paul'?; Freur's squiggle name; playing …The Game: Tommy Edwards.

Which LPs don't include their title track?

Let us answer your rock-related questions and put musical doubts to rest.

I was listening to P.J. Harvey's *Rid Of Me*, which includes the song Dry, which was the title of her previous record. The Doors' 1970 LP *Morrison Hotel* features a song called Waiting For The Sun, which was the title of their 1968 LP. Is leaving title songs off albums normal?

Zack Richards, via e-mail

MOJO says: Well, it's a shame to waste a good title. This happens plenty and the highest and best do it. As well as being the title of his 1967 debut, there was a track called Safe As Milk on Beefheart's 1968 LP *Strictly Personal*; Queen's song Sheer Heart Attack was on *News Of The World* (1977) and not the 1974 album of that name; Led Zeppelin's Houses Of The Holy was on 1975's *Physical Graffiti*; the titular song of AC/DC's 1978 *If You Want Blood You've Got It* was on *Highway To Hell* (1979), and Cucumber Castle was on *Bee Gees' 1st* in 1967 before naming their 1970 LP/TV special. Other examples include Tom Waits' 1987 LP *Franks Wild Years* (a song on 1983's *Swordfishtrombones*), Talk Talk's *The Colour Of Spring* (a track on Mark Hollis's 1998 solo LP) and The Gun Club's *Fire Of Love* (a cover version of a 1958 Jody Reynolds 45, which appeared on *Miami*). There's also a plethora of album titles demoted to B-sides to enjoy, such as the JAMC's Psychocandy (on the Some Candy Talking EP), Primal Scream's Screamadelica (on the Dixie-Narco EP), Smashing Pumpkins' Siamese Dream (the flipside of the Disarm single) and Pulp's His'N'Hers (on The Sisters EP). Pleasantly brain-singeing is the Möbius strip-like case of Elvis Costello's Almost Blue: the title of his 1981 country covers LP, it was a song on 1982's *Imperial Bedroom*, an album which consigned its title song to the B-side of film-theme 45, Party Party. Tell us your faves!

Getty (2), PoPsie Randolph/Getty

A CRASH OF SYMBOLS

I seem to remember a band having a song in the charts who used a sign rather than a name. I think it was in the early '80s, way before Prince had his symbol. Am I right?

Rob Chisnall, via e-mail

MOJO says: Could you be thinking of pre-Underworld band Freur, whose official name was a graphic squiggle? Their song Doot-Doot was a minor hit in 1983. The symbols-as-name thing is lots of fun, as Four Tet's side-project ⁞ ⓜ ◑ ◦ ♪ ⁘ ⍜ ⍝ ⓜ will tell you, and while we're here, how about a big hand for Ottawa psych rockers The Band Whose Name Is A Symbol?

LENNON DEMO POSER

Did John Lennon really label his demos 'For Paul' before he died? The lack of any primary source to substantiate this makes me wonder if it's an urban myth created by some misty-eyed Beatles fan.

Jonathan Chadwick, via e-mail

MOJO says: This is one of those factoids – repeated by the BBC, The Guardian and elsewhere – that you want to be true. However, an image of a scribbled-on Lennon cassette demo was released for the Plastic Ono Band's *The Ultimate Mixes* set, so there's clearly no bashfulness in presenting his home recordings candidly. Also, the cassette single of Now And Then, designed to look like a Sony CHF90, uses Lennon's handwriting for the title, so had a tape marked 'For Paul' existed surely it would have been used. One theory is that it was Yoko who wrote 'For Paul' on the tape when she handed it over, pre-*Anthology*, in 1994; MOJO's requests for clarity from The Beatles' representatives have been met with an enigmatic silence, so anyone who wants to keep on believing, feel free.

RE-RECORDINGS REVISITED

On the heels of your lead question [MOJO 363], 'Who re-recorded their songs,' you featured David English's great letter about It's All In The Game, which was an instrumental for years until it became a hit with lyrics, recorded by Tommy Edwards. As it happens, Tommy re-recorded this very song himself. His first version came out in 1951, reaching Number 18 on a Billboard chart of songs most played by disc jockeys. But he re-recorded it in 1958, in a stereo rock'n'roll version, which then became a Number 1 hit for six weeks!

D. Share, Chicago

HELP MOJO

Once Eric Clapton had a short meeting with Elvis Presley in a movie theatre in Memphis. But nobody seems to be sure if this happened in July 1974 or June 1975 (as Clapton played Memphis both in '74 and '75). Three of the people present (Richard Cole, Jerry Schilling and Pattie Boyd) have written books, but all were published many years after the event, and with not enough details to pinpoint the year. Was this meeting ever mentioned in any English newspapers or music magazines?

Tom Ogland, Norway

CONTACT MOJO

Have you got a challenging musical question for the MOJO Brains Trust? E-mail askmojo@bauermedia.co.uk and we'll help untangle your trickiest puzzles.

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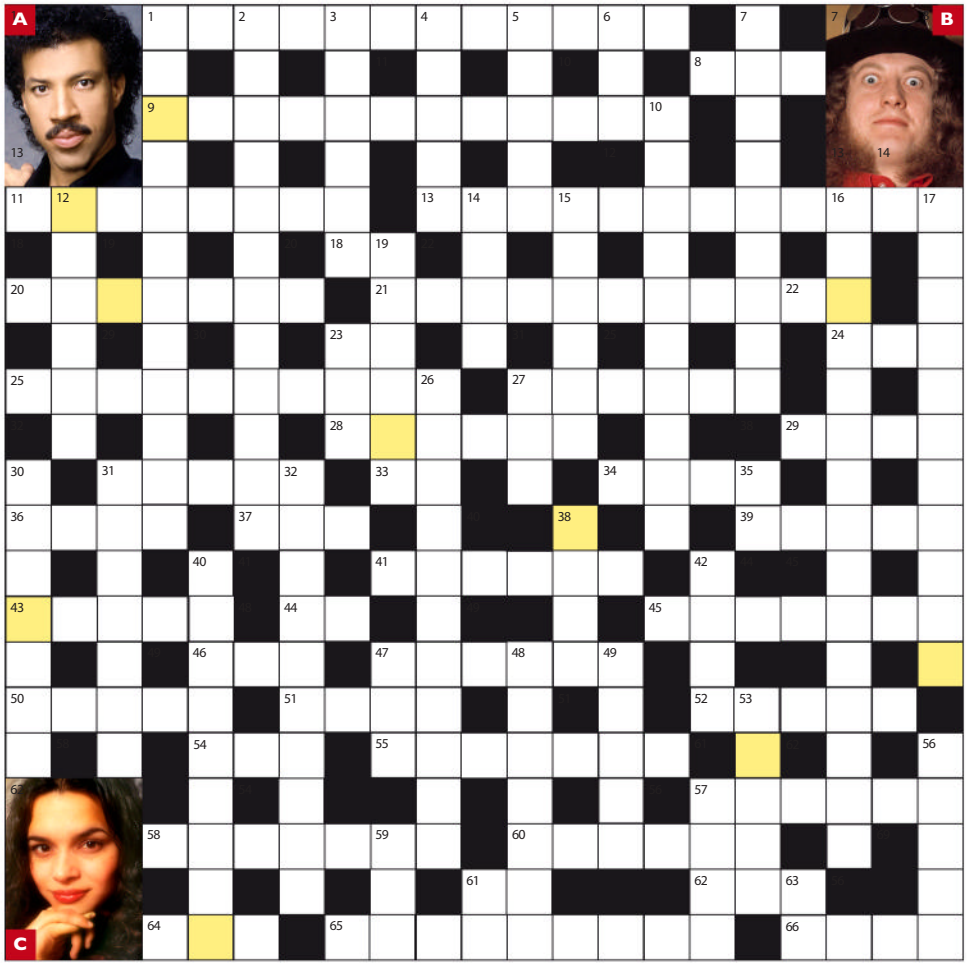
For more info, visit: lenco.uk



Getty (3)

ANSWERS

MOJO 363

Across: 1 Johnny Cash, 6 Osibisa, 11 Never Can Say Goodbye, 12 Sabotage, 14 Pressure Drop, 15 Dynamite Woman, 16 Crouton, 19 Rat Trap, 21 One Night, 22 Lied, 25 Rank, 26 Used, 27 Angel, 29 FCC, 31 Thor, 32 Ox, 33 Routers, 35 Nesuhi, 37 Two, 39 Enigma, 40 Solid, 41 Daffodil, 43 Issue, 44 Goth, 45 Ra, 47 Object, 48 Disintegration, 49 Head, 50 Asylums 52 Trigger, 54 Hue, 55 OCS, 56 Kid, 57 Zoe, 58 Dead.

Down: 1 Junco Partner, 2 Have A Cigar, 3 Nerve Net, 4 Clampdown, 5 Sister Anne, 7 Scour, 8 Body Double, 9 Say No More, 10 Gypsy, 13 Any Day Now, 17 Return Of Django, 18 Egghead, 20 Patti LaBelle, 21 OK Fred, 23 Id, 24 Dixieland, 28 Loose Ends, 30 CSN, 32 Oh, 34 I Get Lifted, 36 Scorchers, 37 Third, 38 Oasis, 42 Date, 46 Drum, 47 Oneida, 50 Ark, 51 She, 53 ECM.

Winner: Reader **Chris Charlesworth** wins a set of Audio Pro A48 speakers.

ACROSS

1 See photoclue A (6,6)
8 R&B label, home to Ike & Tina Turner (3)
9 Robert Wyatt sings Costello in '82 (12)
11 How Eno took *Tiger Mountain* by (8)
13 The Stones couldn't get any (12)
18 The Continental -- (Will Oldham and Dave Pajo duo) (2)
20 The Necks' Hanging place (7)
21 "----------, ----------, will you do the fandango?" (11)
23 Arcade Fire talk about us in '22 (2)
24 Dancers of the *Leggy Mambo*? (3)
25 Alice Cooper's 1972 calling card (7,3)
27 Keepers of *Hotel California* (6)
28 Lighthouse, Combustible or Machado (6)
29 Affirmation used in song title by Yello (4)
31 Marvin and Tammi declared the world was just a big one in 1969 (5)
33 Ex-Sleep doom-stoners (2)
34 Howlin' Wolf's last charting US single (4)
36 The ---- Queen by The Who (4)
37 Patrice Rushen's immediate 1984 LP (3)
39 Guildford prog band, keepers of *The Snow Goose* (5)
41 Saxon's Biff (6)
43 Former tall-standing record retailer (5)
44 Marias, Acoustics or Temple (2)
45 The Fall paired one with an air rifle (7)
46 The digital stuff Bright Eyes keeps in his digital urn (3)
47 Fleetwood Mac shrug in 1969 (2, 4)
50 Lionised Irish rockers? (5)
51 *Mother* ----, The Gun Club (4)
52 Spiky Melvins LP from 1994 (5)
54 Metallers who debuted in '83 with Holy Diver (3)
55 First 45 from Big Star's *Radio City* (1,2,4)
57 Type of jazz played by Kenny G? (6)
58 Punks who crossed the Red Sea (7)
60 Genesis have a go at the police? (6)
61 Mr Cocker's alias, Jarv -- (2)
62 Source Family cult leader Father --- (3)
64 UK label, home of The Kinks, Petula Clark etc (3)
65 Self-titled R.E.M. compilation? (9)
66 Throwaway Macca song, demo'd by the Fabs? (4)

DOWN

1 Where Meat Loaf spent midnight (4,3,5)
2 *The Blues And The Abstract Truth* saxman (6,6)
3 Christian Burchard's enduring Munich jazz-rockers (6)
4 The -----, Kami Thompson and James Walbourne's band (5)
5 Chess's jazz subsidiary (5)
6 Neil Young & Crazy Horse, Ramada --- (3)
7 Manc-punk's originators of the Spiral Scratch (9)
10 Jack Jones' present for you in '62 (4,2,4)
12 *Vive La* ------, said Amon Düül II (6)
14 Faith, Yauch or Clayton (4)
15 Bo Diddley's claim to masculinity (2,1,3)
16 Beefheart treats his avian friend in '82? (3,5,3,4)
17 See photoclue B (5,6)
19 ------ *Punk* by 'O' Level, 1977 (6)
23 Billy Daniels said it thrice in 1964 (3)
26 Why Can't We Live Together?, he asked in '73 (6,6)
27 Rave producer who sampled David Lynch on his track Spice (3)
30 ABC's 1983 mini-movie, directed by Julien Temple (7)
31 Jelly Roll Morton hits black gold in 1932 (3,4)
32 See photoclue C (5,5)
35 The struggle continues for The Durutti Column in '81 (2)
38 Chansonnier par excellence Jacques (4)
40 Jason Lytle's forefatherly group (9)
42 Electronic label, home of Aphex Twin (4)
47 She released *Yes, I'm A Witch* in 2007 (3)
48 Lou Reed, "on one" in 2000? (7)
49 Branigan, Marling or Nyro (5)
53 AKA John Stevens, PiL manager (5)
56 Sheffield "industrial funk" band (5)
57 Candy, Lisa and Stephanie all did the same ----, the Velvets said (4)
59 Liverpool indie-dance act brought *Emotion Lotion* in 1991 (3)
61 The crowd Dobie Gray moved in (2)
63 Profession of Tony Blackburn, David Guetta and more (2)

Changing channels: Alternative TV at The Roxy, London, 1977 (from left) Tyrone Thomas, Mark Perry, Alex Fergusson.

Mark Perry & Alternative TV

It started with the UK's first punk fanzine – and ended with downers and disillusionment.

HELLO MARCH 1977

I never had aspirations to be in a band, let alone be a journalist, but after the success of [Perry's punk 'zine] Sniffin' Glue I was everywhere. I was like the spokesperson of punk, interviewed in all the papers. That's when Miles Copeland [brother of The Police's Stewart] approached me to run a new label, Step Forward. This must have been December 1976. I was really excited, it was my chance to put out the music I liked. Then once we were releasing records, I thought, Why don't I get a band together? I was writing lyrics and had met [guitarist] Alex Fergusson through Sandy Robertson at Sounds, and we both liked the same sort of stuff.

We had our first real rehearsal in March 1977 at Throbbing Gristle's Industrial Records studio in Hackney, as I'd got to know Genesis P-Orridge. I'd never seen a synthesizer before, so to be in that kind of creative environment blew me away. In July 1976 I'd been this working-class kid from Deptford with a job in a bank, then eight months later I was the editor of the best rock'n'roll mag in the world, running my own label, playing in a band.

I did an interview with Record Mirror saying, "We're gonna sound like Can and have reggae rhythms", which was me being pretentious, but in fairness some of our early stuff was pretty out there. Also, I was becoming disenchanted with the punk scene, what with The Clash signing to CBS and everyone sticking with the old formulas. Why couldn't we be different? I've always been a person who gets bored quickly then wants to move on. When we wrote [ATV punk anthem] Action Time Vision, after about a month I didn't want to play it any more! (*laughs*) Alex and I ended up falling out really badly; I think he was more interested in perfecting what we had as a band. We had a big fight and I chucked him out.

After that, Dennis Burns joined on bass and we made *The Image Has Cracked*, which wasn't like a regular punk record, it was quite challenging, but it got amazing reviews. Miles Copeland booked us on a US tour in early 1978, but by the time the album came out I was already fed up with it. The drummer ended up leaving, the guitarist left. It fell apart and all that was left was me and Dennis.

"I was becoming disenchanted with the punk scene…"
MARK PERRY

GOODBYE SUMMER 1981

I was listening to jazz, all sorts of weird experimental shit. I thought all the punk bands were turning into Thin Lizzy, so Dennis and I recorded [1979's] *Vibing Up The Senile Man (Part 1)*, which for a second album wasn't just bold, it was reckless. I mean, the nearest equivalent was probably PiL's *The Flowers Of Romance*. One of the funniest reviews was by Garry Bushell, who called it "a disgrace to Deptford" (*laughs*). I still stand by it… but you can tell by the lyrics – about suicide, alienation – I was miserable. I was taking Mogadons, lots of downers. I had been top of the punk tree, but a year or so on I didn't know where I fitted in any more.

After that I started doing stuff in the margins, like The Good Missionaries, which I liked. Then in 1980 Miles Copeland, who was managing The Police, said to me, "Look, Mark, you're not making any money. Why don't you get together with Alex for one last album?" So we made *Strange Kicks*, this well-crafted new wave powerpop type record. I think we did a few gigs but lost interest. The band fell apart so I got job in WH Smith.

Two years later I started making music again, which I've carried on doing on-off ever since. Our latest album, *Direct Action* (Fourth Dimension, 2023), is this experimental electronica. Those old punk bands that tour their old hits, to me that's like having a regular job – something I've always tried to avoid.

As told to Pat Gilbert

Mark Perry's 'zine compendium Sniffin' Glue… And Other Rock'n'Roll Habits is published by Omnibus Press on February 29.

Coming unglued: Perry (front, centre) in the final ATV line-up, 1981; (left) Mark today.

Erica Echenberg/Getty, Miles Copeland, Courtesy Mark Perry

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